

Tummy Time Tips!

Helping to Prevent Skull Deformities



Establishing a tummy time routine with your infant is an important activity to help promote growth and development. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends infants sleep on their backs due to the risk of sudden infant death syndrome. Most infants also spend additional time on their backs throughout the day in car seats, swings, and chairs. When the child spends excessive time on his or her back, the development of flat spots on the skull can occur. Flat spots can be worsened in infants who favor one side of the head.

According to recent research, one in five infants under the age of 6 months has a flat spot.¹ The current medical treatment for moderate to severe flat spots involves an expensive, specially designed helmet. However, a newly published report found repositioning and tummy time can be effective preventative measures for all infants, and

may help treat mild to moderate skull deformities. Reposition how you orient the child in relation to his/her environment. Alternate which end you place the infant's head in the crib to encourage turning the head to each side to see objects in the room. If a flat spot has started to develop, orient the child so she/he turns his head opposite the flat spot. Tummy time also aides in strengthening head, neck, and upper back muscles and helps promote the development of reaching, rolling, and crawling.²

Incorporating Tummy Time Into Your Daily Routine

- o Begin modified tummy time right away.
- o Establish a tummy time routine gradually; initially, some infants may only tolerate short bursts of 15-30 seconds.
- o Work towards a total of 40-60 minutes of tummy time per day.²
- o Use tummy time during activities you already perform, such as applying lotion, towel drying after bath time, or diaper changes.²
- o Place brightly colored toys and mirrors in front of and around your infant to encourage lifting his/her head and reaching.
- o Use blankets with varying textures and high-contrast colors.
- o Get on the floor to talk and play with your infant during tummy time.
- o Limit the amount of time infants spend in car seats, swings, or chairs, which place them on their back and tend to recline and restrict independent movement.^{1,2}
- o If your infant starts to cry or fatigue, take a break and return to tummy time later in the day.

Positioning your infant on your stomach or chest during waking periods is an a modified way to incorporate tummy time, especially for newborns.



Before starting a tummy time routine with you infant, there are a few precautions to consider:

- Assure your baby is always supervised during tummy time.
- Only participate in tummy time when your infant is awake and alert.
- Always use a safe surface for tummy time.
- Prior to establishing a new tummy time routine, consult your physician to assure it is safe for your infant to participate.²

1. Saint Louis, G. (2014, May 1). Helmets do little to help moderate infant skull flattening, study finds. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/helmets-do-little-to-help-moderate-infant-skull-flattening-study-finds/?_php=true&_type=blogs&partner-rss&emc=rss&_r=0

2. American Occupational Therapy Association (2013). Establishing tummy time routines to enhance your baby's development. Retrieved from <http://www.aota.org/About-Occupational-Therapy/Patients-Clients/ChildrenAndYouth/Tummy-Time.aspx>