

'Tummy Time'

Tummy Time play has become an important part of development in recent years; this is because parents and professionals are now strongly advised to sleep babies on their backs for safety reasons. This means that for babies to develop their core skills and cross lateral brain connections we need to compensate for them sleeping on their backs by providing and encouraging tummy time play. For further information on safer sleeping go to www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Tummy time play during waking hours is important to the motor development of babies as it allows them to gain head and body control. Motor control develops in a 'cephalocaudal' fashion, which means a baby first gains control of their head, then their shoulders and then their abdomen and so on down to their feet.

Many parents as well as some day care facilities are using equipment for holding the baby up in a seated position before they are ready. Car seats, bumbos, baby walkers and entertainers are some of the items parents use to 'hold' their baby in place at a very young age and this does not help babies to strengthen their own core muscles, balance (vestibular system) and cross lateral brain connections.

Developing head control allows babies to visually explore everything around them and this strength will prepare them for crawling as well as getting them ready to push up, roll over and eventually to stand. Without tummy time, babies may miss out the crawling stage altogether which could impact on their learning and development and their toilet training later on!










As well as gross motor skills, tummy time play encourages babies' fine motor skills. For example as they grasp at your clothing while you hold them across your legs or on your chest or they grasp at a blanket they are lying on as they balance on one arm to reach for toys.

Having tummy time also helps the development of a baby's skull. With babies spending more time on their backs, paediatricians have noted an increase in flatheads or misshapen heads. Babies' skulls are still quite soft and constantly lying on their backs without changing the head position can cause a flattened effect on the back of a baby's head.

Encouraging 'tummy time'

Place babies on a firm, flat surface on their tummy with their arms forward – a rug on the floor is best, as a soft or padded surface makes it too hard for a baby to move. To begin with, even on a firm surface, moving on their tummy is hard work for babies and they will tire quickly and as this is something new, a baby might not like it for more than a few seconds! The answer is to persevere with very short but frequent periods of play; allowing them to gradually build up the strength and learn to move more efficiently.

Help babies become more confident by playing some of these games:

-  While you are lying on your back or reclining, lay the baby on your tummy so that they will be encouraged to lift up and look at your face. Try gently rocking them from side to side as you hold them.
-  Lie down on the floor facing the baby and talk or sing to them.
-  Hold a rattle or a squeaky toy, wave a colourful silky scarf or place a mirror in front of baby, for them to look at.
-  Sit on the floor and hold baby on their tummy across your lap or thighs. Gently stroke them rhythmically down their back, making circular motions between their shoulder blades.
-  Lie baby on different textures: a (treated) lambskin or a 'feelie blanket' made of squares of contrasting fabrics such as soft velvet and corduroy, coarse hessian, shiny satin, and woollen, fleecy or fluffy fabrics. Curtain shops often sell sample squares of suitable fabrics in inexpensive bundles.
-  Place a toy within baby's reach – perhaps a coloured ball or a plastic bottle with some bells or marbles and tinsel in it (make sure the lid is tightly secured and supervise).
-  Swish the baby through the air to music, supporting them with your arms and hands under their body and chest.
-  Lie baby across a beach ball or exercise ball, or a rolled up sleeping-bag, and rock them gently to and fro and sideways: this will also stimulate their vestibular (balance) system and help them get used to being in different positions.
-  If the baby can't support their weight on their forearms, support them on a rolled-up towel placed beneath the arms, with their arms forward so they can practise mini push-ups or play with a toy. When they can get up on his forearms independently, remove the pillow and let them work on their motor skills without it.

******Remember, never leave a baby on their tummy unsupervised******