

A Workout For Newborns? Tummy Time Is An Infant's First Exercise Program

Between sleeping, and sitting in car seats, baby swings and bouncy seats, babies spend a whole lot of time with their heads against a flat surface – increasing the risk of flat head syndrome. Although it is necessary to support an infant's head and neck during those first few months, experts say it is equally important to start your baby on his first exercise program as soon as possible.

Tummy Time – placing a baby on his belly on a firm, flat surface, or across your lap or on your chest under your strict supervision – is a proven way to help infants reach developmental milestones and to prevent skull deformities. And you can start as soon as a baby's first day at home, says Deborah Flanagan-Thornton, PT, DPT, C/NDT, NCH physical therapist specializing in pediatrics.

“A baby should spend three to five minutes several times a day [on his belly] and work up to 60 minutes total, spaced throughout the day, by about three months old,” recommends Flanagan-Thornton. “When a newborn is placed on his belly, it encourages head, shoulder and arm strength so he can learn how to roll over, sit up and crawl.”

The most common position for Tummy Time is when you place your baby face down on the floor and sit nearby. Experts recommend placing toys – and yourself – just out of reach to encourage the baby to move. Alternate your baby's position by lying next to him on your side, or sit face-to-face. “Parents need to enjoy their babies,” says Flanagan-Thornton. “They grow so fast!”

Other Tummy Time positions include the Tummy Minute, right after diapering or bathing to get the infant used to the positioning as part

of a routine, and the Football Hold, where the caretaker places one hand under the tummy and between the legs, carrying the baby face-down while supporting them close to your body.

If the baby enters day care, Flanagan-Thornton tells parents to discuss Tummy Time with the baby's caretakers. “Ask your daycare provider to keep track of Tummy Time too,” she suggests.

Tummy Time is recommended in conjunction with Back to Sleep, a public education initiative to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) by teaching caretakers to place babies on their backs while they sleep.

If your baby does develop a flat spot, or tends to look in one direction while lying down, Flanagan-Thornton recommends talking to a pediatrician first. “We are here to help them,” she says. “We love working with families.”



**For more information about Tummy Time contact
NCH Outpatient Rehabilitation at 239-624-6820.**