Why Your Baby Needs Tummy Time

Experts advise that parents place babies on their backs for sleeping. This reduces sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). But to develop motor skills, it is important for your baby to spend time on his or her tummy as well. During waking hours, tummy time will help your baby develop neck, arm and trunk muscles. These muscles help your baby turn her or his head, reach, roll, sit and crawl.

How do I give my baby tummy time?

Some babies may not like to lie on their tummies at first. With help, your baby will begin to enjoy tummy time. Give your baby tummy time for a few minutes, four times per day. Always be there to watch your child. As your child gets older and stronger, give more tummy time with less support.

• Place your baby on your chest while you are lying on your back or sitting back. Place your baby’s arms under the baby’s chest and urge him or her to look at you.

• Put a towel roll under your baby’s chest with the arms in front. Help your baby push into the floor.

• Place your hand on your baby’s bottom to get him or her to lift the head.

• Lay your baby over your leg and urge her or him to reach for a toy.

• Carry your baby with the tummy toward the floor. Urge your baby to look up and around at things in the room.
What happens when a baby lies only on his or her back?

If babies always lie on their backs, they can develop problems. If they tend to turn their heads to the same side, their heads may become flat (plagiocephaly). Or the neck muscles may become tight on one side (torticollis). This could lead to problems with:

- using both sides of the body
- looking to one side
- reaching with one arm
- balancing
- learning how to roll, sit, or walk at the same time as other children of the same age.

How do I reduce the risk of these problems?

Tummy time will help prevent these problems. Here are some other things you can do.

- Vary which end of the bed you place your baby’s head. This will get her or him to turn the head to both sides.
- Regularly change the side where you place toys for your baby. This will get him or her to turn the head to both the right and left sides.
- Change sides during each feeding (breastfeeding or bottle feeding).
- Change your baby’s position while she or he is awake. Place your child on the floor lying on the back, stomach or side (place child on both sides).
- Limit your baby’s time in car seats, swings, bouncy seats and exercise saucers. These tend to press on the back of the head.

How can I help my baby develop motor skills?

As often as you can, hold your baby or watch him or her play on the floor. If you give your baby chances to move, he or she should develop the skills listed below. This is a general guide. A baby with normal development may learn some skills earlier or later.

- A newborn will make faces when seeing, hearing, touching or tasting something. When placed on the tummy, a newborn can lift his or her head high enough to breathe.
- A one-month-old can reach either hand to the mouth. When placed on the tummy, he or she can turn the head to both sides.
- A two-month-old can push up on the elbows and lift her or his head to look at a toy.
- A three-month-old can lift the head and chest from the floor and begin to roll.
- A four-to-five-month-old can hold arms and legs off the floor when lying on the back. On the tummy, the baby can straighten the arms and support her or his weight through the hands.
- A six-month-old can roll over to the right or left. He or she is starting to sit up without support.

If you have any concerns, please call your baby’s doctor or a physical therapist. For more information, you may call Fairview Pediatric Rehabilitation.