

Tummy Time

PD on the Go

Narrator: Welcome to PD on the Go. Today, we'll be talking about tummy time and free play for infants.

Woman 1: Because even with her mad and lifting her head, she's going to use more of those muscles and stretch out her neck more. And if she's already going to be mad, let her get the exercise too. Okay? Not a long time. Some people are like, do you want me to do it for 20 minutes? No. I'm talking more like 3 to 5 minutes at most.

Narrator: Tummy time. Placing babies on their tummies for brief periods while they're awake helps babies develop strong neck, arm, shoulder, and back muscles. Over time, babies learn to reach for an object while on their tummies and roll from this position as well. These new skills and abilities will help them prepare for crawling, pulling up, and, later, walking.

Not all of the families you work with are going to be familiar with tummy time, or know about its benefits. But you can help families make tummy time part of their ongoing routine.

Beginning. Pediatricians say newborns can start tummy time at just a few days old. Parents can begin placing babies on their tummies for 1 to 2 minutes at a time. Adults can gradually add a minute or so to tummy time routine as baby begins to develop more neck control and is able to hold his head up for longer periods. Regular tummy time should continue until baby begins to crawl.

Scheduling. Families often wonder how to fit tummy time into their already busy days. You can show families how to add tummy time to daily routines. For example, they could try short tummy time sessions after a diaper change or nap time. If baby feels comfortable in the tummy time position, allow her to continue playing on her belly until she offers cues that she's getting tired, like crying, looking frustrated, or arching her back. After some rest time, parents can try tummy time again.

Safety tips. As a home visitor, you can help families find safe places inside the home for baby's tummy time or help the family to create new spaces that keep babies secure. Remind parents that babies should never be placed on their stomachs to sleep. The rule to remember is back to sleep, tummy to play. You can share these tips as well.

Place baby on a flat and firm surface, like a mat or sheet on the floor or a hard bed with a tightly fitted sheet. Provide enough space for baby to roll and reach with nothing around him that he could grab on to or pull on top of himself. Make sure that baby is fully alert and awake when on his belly. Supervise the baby and watch for signs that he's getting tired or uncomfortable. Then transition him to another position or activity.

Reassure parents that not all babies like tummy time at first. Lifting his head is hard work. It's okay to pick him up when he's fussy or ready to move on to something else. Tummy time is an important way to help babies build their early physical skills. And it's also a great starting point for nurturing active play from birth.