

## PT ADVICE TO ENCOURAGE YOUR BABY'S MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

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### Tummy Time / Floor Time

Since the 90s, parents have been told to put infants on their back to sleep, which significantly decreases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

However, a baby being on their back *all* the time can lead to flattening of the skull, and it doesn't provide them with enough variety and opportunity, which they need to learn movement.

Therefore, although it is of course recommended that infants sleep on their backs, they can, and should, play on their tummies and on their sides during the day when they are awake and supervised.

Tummy time allows for babies to literally get off their backs and avoid skull flattening. Experiencing this new position also helps their sensory development, which will help with motor development, and also self-regulation. Finally, tummy time is especially important for the development of head and trunk control, and arms strength, which will later help them achieve milestones such as rolling, crawling, and sitting.

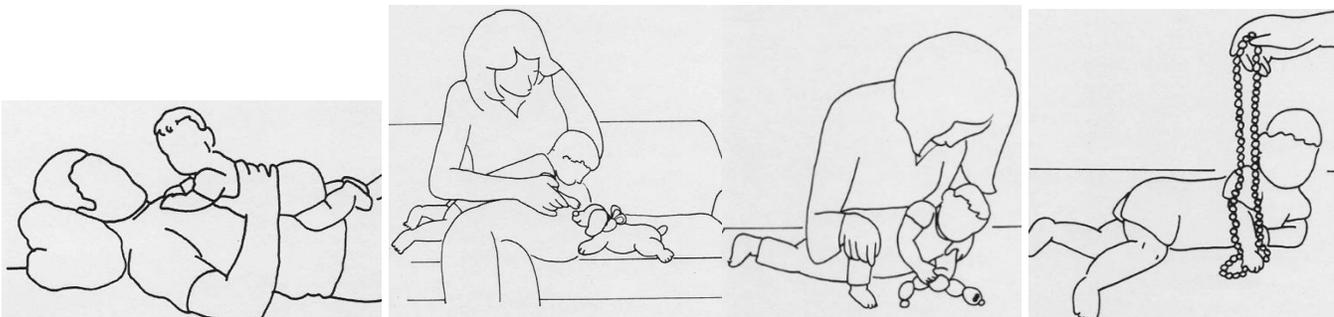
So here are some tips for a better tummy time experience:

1. Do it after a nap, a bath, or a diaper change, **when your baby is happiest** and most energetic. Don't do it right after feeding, especially if your baby has reflux. Make it part of your **daily routine** (for example, after every diaper change).
2. **Start tummy time as early as possible**, especially if you notice a flattening of the skull. Make it a daily activity even if your baby can't hold their head up for more than a few seconds. **Side lying** to the right and to the left is also a great floor activity to do regularly!

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3. **Build up tummy time progressively** to allow your baby to get acquainted with this new position. Begin with a few seconds or minutes at a time, at least 5 times a day. By the age of 4-5 months, they should be able to play for over an hour a day on their tummies (throughout the day).
4. Most babies will not like this new position at the beginning, and that's understandable! So try to **make it fun** for them! Put them on your chest, or lie down next to them so they can see your face. Talk or sing to the child, and use music or light toys, rattles, and mirrors to increase the length of their tummy time. To help them looking at their surroundings, you can put a little towel rolled up under their chest. You can also do tummy time up on the couch or bed so they can see their surroundings better instead of only seeing the ground. Of course, never leave them up there unsupervised or they could fall off.
5. Gently hold their elbows under their shoulders to help them feel the ground's support and free up some space for their head to lift up.
6. Gently rub their back between the shoulder blades, from the neck down, which can help stimulate the muscles lifting the head up.
7. **Don't give up**, a few seconds or minutes at a time is making a huge difference for them! You're doing great no matter what! When your baby is not feeling it, just switch positions, have fun for a bit, and try it again later. They might vocalize to let you know this is outside of their comfort zone, so always make sure it's comfortable and fun. And when you feel that they really had enough, pick them up and **give them tons of love as a reward for doing their best!** 😊



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## Crossing the midline

Crossing this midline means that the child brings the right hand or foot over to the left side of their body, and vice versa. This is crucial to develop communication between the left and right sides of the brain.

Put simply, this communication is important because each side of the brain has different roles and tasks; therefore, to work together efficiently, they need to keep in touch on what is happening on each side.

As your infant becomes older, this communication between the two sides of the brain will be necessary in achieving the bilateral coordination involved in many fine and gross motor tasks, such as throwing and catching a ball, handwriting, reading, using scissors, etc.

***Isn't it amazing that we can facilitate future learning right now by encouraging baby to cross the midline with their hands and feet?***

Crossing the midline also helps strengthen the core muscles responsible for rotation between the pelvis and the ribcage, allowing the development of central stability. Children who struggle to develop central stability, may later find it harder to develop a mature walking pattern, posture, and advanced motor skills like running, jumping, and riding a bike.

### Here are some activities to encourage crossing the midline:

1. In very young infants, **start with visual tracking** of a toy from one side to the other. For a 0–3 month old, I suggest toys with highly contrasting colors (dark vs. white), lights, and music. A great “toy” for the baby to look at is also their caregivers and siblings’ faces! **Make sure baby learns to turn their head all the way to the left, and all the way to the right!**



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2. Around 3 months old, babies will start **reaching** for the target as well as looking at it. When they are interested enough in a target, move it from left to right to bring the left arm towards the right side of the baby, and vice versa. This can eventually also be done on their tummies as well. Have them reach up with one hand to touch a toy across the midline. Make sure to regularly provide them with the “reward” (getting the toy), even if they didn’t quite make it, so they stay interested in this activity.
3. Have the baby hold objects with two hands and bang two objects together.
4. Bring their feet up to the hands and playing with the left foot in the right hand, and vice versa. This helps for body awareness, abdominals development, and, of course, crossing the midline. While they are still learning this skill, you can put a fold up towel under their bum to help the legs reach the hands.
5. As their motor skills emerge, encourage them to practice A LOT the following: rolling to the left and to the right, crawling, and climbing over pillows or an adult’s lap.



## **Babies with a Dominance of Extension Movement Patterns**

All movements in the body involve a combination of movements in different directions. These include:

- flexion, or bending
- rotation or twisting
- extension, or straightening

Some babies tend to have an over use of extension, and a limited amount of rotation and flexion. This is more common in babies who were born prematurely, who were prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol, or who have reflux, but sometimes there is no known reason.

When held in standing they often stiffen their legs and push right up on their toes. In sitting they tend to draw their arms up and back and are often stuck in this position without the ability to move in and out themselves. These little ones often arch back when picked up. It is common that they dislike tummy time, and aren't afraid to let the world know that.

### **What can you do to decrease your baby's extension?**

Standing is a very comfortable position for many of these babies and they like being in equipment that places them in this position such as jumpers and exersaucers. Unfortunately, all this standing reinforces the muscle groups (extensors) that are already strong, and does not teach them to use the flexion and rotation muscles that are required for true standing and walking later on. For these babies, time in standing equipment should be very limited, or better yet eliminated all together. Also, be conscious of the amount of time you hold your child in a standing position, and make sure you offer them a variety of other positions and floor time.

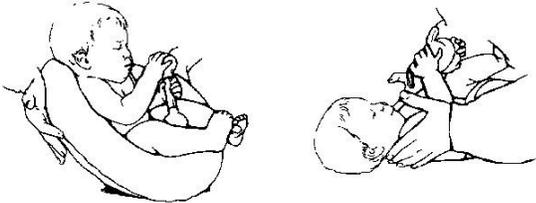
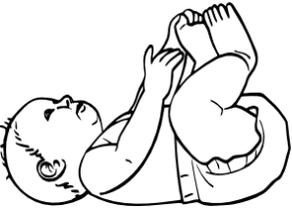
### **AVOID THIS:**



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## AND ENCOURAGE THIS:

	<p>Encourage spending a bit more time in a rounded or flexed spine position. Position your baby with legs curled and shoulders rounded inward. Tuck the chin in slightly. Bring the hands together in front of the chest or face.</p>
	<p>While lying on his/her back on the floor, help your baby curl his/her legs and bottom off the floor to play with their feet or kick objects dangled from an overhead frame. Sometimes a small pillow or folded receiving blanket tucked under the baby's bottom can give them a lift too.</p>
	<p>Use a rolled blanket under the chest for support when playing on tummy, to discourage the "swimming" or "Superman" position, and rather encourage arms to go forward with weight bearing through the forearms.</p>
	<p>Help with rolling by turning the baby's legs off to one side and moving through the motions of rolling. You can help your baby to roll from tummy to back and back to tummy.</p>
	<p>Encourage your baby to twist his/her body in sitting by encouraging reaching across the middle of the body with both arms for a motivating toy. Two handed play should be encouraged.</p>

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When picking up from and setting down on the floor, you can roll your baby up slowly through side lying, allowing them to assist with their muscles. Do this on the right side and on the left side. See how much they can do themselves.



Carrying to the side helps to increase the use of the side muscles also. Do this on the right and on the left.