

Tummy time: why it matters and how to make it enjoyable

With safer sleep guidance for babies becoming statutory in September 2026, parents and educators may be less inclined to place babies on their fronts. There has also been critique of placing babies on their fronts before they are able to assume the position independently. If you are caring for babies from birth to around six to nine months, you may have come across the phrase “tummy time.” Health visitors, midwives, and early years educators often talk about it, and for good reason. Because babies spend so much time lying on their backs for safe sleep, tummy time gives them important opportunities to develop strength and coordination when they are awake.

What is tummy time?

Tummy time simply means placing baby on their tummy while they are awake and fully supervised. In this position, babies can start to explore how to lift and move their head, neck, arms, and legs. Not only does this build strength in their upper body, but it also gives them a different view of the world around them.

Tummy time is a powerful support for a baby’s physical development. It strengthens their neck, back, shoulder, and arm muscles and helps develop gross motor skills that will be later used for rolling, sitting, crawling, and eventually moving around independently. The NHS Best Start in Life recommends tummy time as a key activity to help babies grow strong and confident as they prepare for their next developmental milestones. In addition, The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists suggest tummy time can reduce:

- Delay in developing movement skills.
- A flattening of the side or back of the head.
- Co-ordination problems in later childhood.

How long should tummy time last?

Start with a little and often approach:

- Just one to two minutes at a time to begin with, after nappy changes can be a great opportunity.
- Aim for short periods a few times a day.
- Slowly increase tummy time as baby becomes more confident and starts to enjoy it.

If baby does not like tummy time at first, do not worry, this is quite common. Try holding them upright for cuddles and play, or make tummy time more interactive with toys, singing, and touch. Follow your instincts and take it at the baby’s pace.

Making tummy time fun

Tummy time is more than a physical exercise; it is a lovely chance to connect and play together. You can begin tummy time from birth, starting gently and gradually.

For newborns

- Skin-to-skin tummy time on your chest can be wonderfully calming and bonding, so newborns often prefer tummy time on your chest, as it feels warm, familiar, and reassuring. Only do this when you are both fully awake.
- Holding baby against your shoulder or on your chest gives them the chance to lift their head to see your face, making early tummy time feel safe and connected.
- Try gentle talking or singing, pairing touch with your voice.

First time on the floor

- You can start offering short tummy time sessions on the floor once your baby is one to two months old, placing baby on a soft blanket to keep things comfortable and lying next to them. As baby grows a little stronger, a rolled-up towel under their chest and armpits can provide extra support if they need it, with an adult next to them. Babies may struggle to keep their heads up for long, so it is vital the adult fully supervises for the duration, watching closely.
- Lie down face-to-face with them - your voice, eye contact, and gentle encouragement make a huge difference.
- Smile, chat and change your expressions, baby will work harder to lift their head to see you.
- Try simple games like peekaboo once they can hold their head up slightly, or offer bright toys, a baby mirror, or simply your smiling face to encourage lifting and reaching.



For babies reaching and crawling

- Getting down at their level, using your voice, eye contact, and gentle encouragement, helps them stay engaged.
- Toys placed just within reach motivate pushing up, reaching, and shifting weight.
- Talk about what baby can see: "It's teddy!"
- Praise their efforts and celebrate every little movement.
- Around four months, many babies can prop up confidently on their forearms.
- After six months, you can introduce more playful movements, such as gentle "Superman" lifts to help build strength in new, fun ways.

Safety tips to keep in mind

- Remember: tummy time should always be fully supervised, and baby should be awake and alert, so only do tummy time when you are fully awake and able to watch baby closely by sitting or lying next to them.
- Avoid covering you both with blankets, babies can overheat quickly.
- Always place baby on a safe, flat surface.
- Stop if baby becomes distressed or tired, brief, positive experiences are key.

Further information

[Baby moves - Best Start in Life - NHS.](#)

[Top tips for tummy time | NCT.](#)

[What is 'Tummy Time' and when should you start it? - BBC Tiny Happy People.](#)

[APCP - TUMMY TIME IDEAS | The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists.](#)