

The importance of tummy time



What is tummy time?

Tummy time is the time your baby spends on his or her tummy during the day whilst awake.

Why is tummy time important?

Since the change in the sleeping advice to parents in the early 1990s in positioning babies on their backs rather than their fronts to sleep, there has been a significant reduction in the number of sudden infant deaths (SIDS).

During this time, the use of car seats and travel systems has also increased, with babies spending more and more time in them. These factors all mean that babies are spending more and more time on their backs, which has also led to an increase in cases of deformational plagiocephaly (sometimes known as flat head syndrome).

Deformational plagiocephaly is a common condition and occurs when external force causes a baby's head to take on an abnormal shape. It is characterised by flattening of one side of the back of the head. Whilst this is a purely cosmetic problem, and will not affect the function of the brain, increased tummy time is a great way of taking the pressure off any flattened areas. It also helps to build strong neck and back muscles, which will help your baby to learn to roll, sit and crawl as they grow.

Following these easy steps and increasing tummy time can reduce the chance of deformational plagiocephaly and help to treat the condition:

1. Have supervised play time with your baby on his or her tummy. You can use a cushion or rolled towel under the chest and arms of the baby, or a tummy time mat. You should do this at least 3 times a day and a good way to remember is to have tummy time after each nappy change.
2. Limit time in baby carriers such as car seats and bouncy chairs.
3. Alternate the side that you hold your baby when feeding.
4. As soon as they have some head control, encourage your baby to play on their tummy when awake.
5. Carry your baby in different positions and use a sling or baby carrier. There are many on the market, and sling advice should be available at your local children's centre.
6. If your baby always faces to one side of the cot, try to alternate the end of the bed that they sleep. To encourage this, you can position a mobile or move the light to their least favourite side.

- Always supervise tummy time
- Never allow your baby to sleep on their tummy
- Always position your baby on their back to sleep

