

The Ultimate Tummy Time Guide



What it should look like at each stage,
and how to make it more enjoyable for
both you and your baby!



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What is Tummy Time

Tummy time is one of the most important activities for your baby's development. It's the foundation for building strength, coordination, and motor skills like rolling, crawling, and sitting. But let's be real—tummy time doesn't always come easily. If your baby cries the second you put them on their belly or you're unsure if they're “doing it right,” you're not alone.



This guide will give you the tools and confidence to support your baby through tummy time and beyond.

0-1 months

Your baby is still adjusting to life outside the womb, so tummy time might be brief and gentle. Expect them to turn their head to one side and work on lifting it slightly.



What it looks like:

A few seconds at a time, perhaps on your chest or a firm, elevated surface, as they work to develop the muscles to lift and turn their head.

Tip: Start with chest-to-chest tummy time for snuggles, bonding, and a gentler introduction.

1-2 months

Your baby will begin lifting their head a little higher, with short bursts of strength. They might start pushing through their arms, but it will take time to build stamina.

What it looks like:

Head lifts at a 30-45 degree angle for a few seconds at a time.

They may quickly lose control - that's completely normal!



Tip: Use a rolled towel under their chest, a tum tum wedge, or prop them on a nursing pillow.

An elevated position helps baby to put more weight through their arms, making it easier for them to lift their head.

3-4 months

By 4 months, your baby should consistently lift their head so it's parallel to the ceiling. You might see baby pushing through their forearms, lifting their chest, and turning their head to look around.



Look out for:

The “swimming” reflex to emerge - babies will bring their arms up like they are swimming and avoid putting weight through their arms.

TIP: Encourage play during tummy time with mirrors, sensory bags, different textures, colorful toys, or engaging movement on a yoga ball to keep them interested.

5-6 months

Your baby is developing stronger arms and a stable core. They might start shifting their weight and reaching for toys. Tummy time will transition into early pivoting and preparation for crawling.

What it looks like:

Pushing up through extended arms, rolling, reaching for toys, and maybe even wiggling forward or backwards.



TIP: Place toys just out of reach to encourage movement.

Tips & Tricks



1. Start Small and Build Up

It's better to have short, happy tummy time sessions than long ones where your baby cries.

Aim for just 1–2 minutes at a time to start.

2. Get Creative with Positioning



- Chest-to-Chest
- Elevated Tummy Time: Use a nursing pillow or rolled towel under their chest. to make it easier!
- Yoga Ball: Lay your baby on their tummy on a yoga ball and gently rock it to make it more engaging.



3. Incorporate Movement and Play

Babies learn through play, so make it fun! Use toys, black and white cards, mirrors, and your voice.



4. Focus on Arm Placement

Make sure your baby's arms are bent, elbows underneath or a bit in front of their shoulders, and palms flat on the ground.

If your baby has reflux...

They may find tummy time more challenging because the position puts direct pressure on their stomach. Here's how to help:

- **Elevate Their Chest:** Use a rolled towel, nursing pillow, or your lap to lift their chest and reduce the pressure on their tummy.
- **Frequent Burping:** Ensure your baby is well-burped before tummy time to minimize discomfort.
- **Think About Timing:** Try waiting about 30 minutes after a feed before trying tummy time. This gives baby some time to digest.
- **Use a Yoga Ball:** The gentle rocking motion can be soothing and reduces the intensity of being flat on the floor. Rocking them back towards you makes them more vertical, and reduces the pressure on their belly.



When to seek help

If you're noticing any of these signs, it might be time to consult a pediatric physical therapist or your pediatrician:

- 1 Your baby cries or consistently avoids lifting their head during tummy time.
- 2 They don't push through their arms by the time they're 3–4 months old.
- 3 You notice stiffness, tension, or a strong preference for turning their head to one side while in tummy time.
- 4 Your baby seems stiff, uncomfortable, or is struggling with milestones like rolling.

It's okay if tummy time isn't picture-perfect. Some days will be easier than others, and that's completely normal. What matters most is that you're showing up and supporting your baby along the way. Remember, with a little patience and practice, tummy time will get easier—for both of you! And if you're feeling stuck or unsure, I'm here to help. Together, we can find ways to make tummy time more enjoyable and beneficial for your baby.



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