

Back to Sleep, Tummy to Play

What are two of the most important things to remember about safe sleep practices ([/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx](#)) for your baby?

- **Healthy babies are safest when sleeping on their backs** ([/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/Sleep-Position-Why-Back-is-Best.aspx](#)) at nighttime and during naps. Side sleeping is not as safe as back sleeping and is not advised.
- **Tummy time is for babies who are awake and being watched.** Your baby needs this to develop strong muscles.



Remember...back to sleep, tummy to play!

How much tummy time should a baby have?

Beginning on their first day home from the hospital or in your family child care home or center, play and interact with the baby while they are awake and on the tummy two to three times each day for a short period of time (3-5 minutes). Increase the amount of time as your baby shows they enjoy the activity. A great time to do this is following a diaper change or when the baby wakes up from a nap.

Tummy time prepares babies for the time when they will be able to slide on their bellies and crawl ([/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Crawling-Styles.aspx](#)). As babies grow older and stronger they will need more time on their tummies to build their own strength.

What if my baby does not like being on their tummy?

Some babies may not like the tummy time position at first. Place yourself or a toy in reach for them to play with. Eventually your baby will enjoy tummy time and begin to enjoy play ([/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Importance-of-Tummy-Time.aspx](#)) in this position.

Doesn't sleeping on their back cause the baby to have a flat head?

Parents and caregivers often worry about the baby developing a flat spot on the back of the head ([/English/health-issues/conditions/Cleft-Craniofacial/Pages/Positional-Skull-Deformities-and-Torticollis.aspx](#)) because of sleeping on the back. Though it is possible for a baby to develop a flat spot on the head, it usually rounds out as they grow older and sit up.

There are ways to reduce the risk of the baby developing a flat spot:

- **Alternate which end of the crib you place the baby's feet.** This will cause them to naturally turn toward light or objects in different positions, which will lessen the pressure on one particular spot on her head.
- **When your baby is awake, vary their position.** Limit time spent in freestanding swings, bouncy chairs and car seats. These items all put added pressure on the back of the baby's head.
- **Spend time holding the baby in your arms as well as watching them play** on the floor, both on their tummy and on her back.
- **A breastfed baby would normally change breasts during feeding;** if the baby is bottle fed, switch the side that they feed on during feeding.

How can I exercise the baby while they are on their tummy?

There are lots of ways to play with the baby while they are on their tummy (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Importance-of-Tummy-Time.aspx>).

- **Place yourself or a toy just out of the baby's reach** during playtime to get them to reach for you or the toy.
- **Place toys in a circle around the baby.** Reaching to different points in the circle will allow them to develop the appropriate muscles to roll over, scoot on their belly and crawl.
- **Lie on your back and place the baby on your chest.** The baby will lift their head and use their arms to try to see your face.
- **While keeping watch, have a young child play with the baby while on their tummy.** Young children can get down on the floor easily. They generally have energy for playing with babies, may really enjoy their role as the "big kid" and are likely to have fun themselves.

How to create a safe sleep environment

Follow these easy steps to create a safe sleep environment (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/a-parents-guide-to-safe-sleep.aspx>) in your home, family child care home or child care center (*see [Keep Your Sleeping Baby Safe](/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx)* (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx>) *for more information*):

- **Always place babies on their backs to sleep**, even for short naps.
- **Place babies on a firm, flat sleep surface that meets current safety standards.** For more information about crib safety standards, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission Web site (<https://www.cpsc.gov/>).
- **Remove any soft objects, loose bedding** or any objects that could increase the risk of entrapment, suffocation, or strangulation from the baby's sleep area. Make sure the baby's head and face remain uncovered during sleep.
- **Place the baby in a smoke-free environment**, away from areas where people use tobacco products.
- **Do not let babies get too hot.** Keep the room where babies sleep at a comfortable temperature. In general, dress babies in no more than one extra layer than you would wear. Babies may be too hot if they are sweating or if their chests feel hot. If you are worried that babies are cold, use a wearable blanket such as a sleeping sack or warm sleeper that is the right size for each baby. These are made to cover the body and not the head.
- **If you are working in a family child care home or center, create a written safe sleep policy** to ensure that staff and families understand and practice back to sleep and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and suffocation risk reduction practices in child care. If you are a parent with a child in out-of-home child care, advocate for the creation of a safe sleep policy.

More information

- [How to Keep Your Sleeping Baby Safe: AAP Policy Explained](/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/a-parents-guide-to-safe-sleep.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/a-parents-guide-to-safe-sleep.aspx>)
- [Is Your Baby's Physical Development on Track?](/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Is-Your-Babys-Physical-Development-on-Track.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Is-Your-Babys-Physical-Development-on-Track.aspx>)
- [Tummy Time Activities](/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Importance-of-Tummy-Time.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Importance-of-Tummy-Time.aspx>)
- [Flat Head Syndrome & Your Baby: Information about Positional Skull Deformities](/English/health-issues/conditions/Cleft-Craniofacial/Pages/Positional-Skull-Deformities-and-Torticollis.aspx) (</English/health-issues/conditions/Cleft-Craniofacial/Pages/Positional-Skull-Deformities-and-Torticollis.aspx>)
- [Baby Helmet Therapy: Parent FAQs](/English/health-issues/conditions/Cleft-Craniofacial/Pages/Baby-Helmet-Therapy-Parent-FAQs.aspx) (</English/health-issues/conditions/Cleft-Craniofacial/Pages/Baby-Helmet-Therapy-Parent-FAQs.aspx>)
- [The Healthy Children Show: Sleep](/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Healthy-Children-Show-Sleep-Video.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/The-Healthy-Children-Show-Sleep-Video.aspx>) (Video)

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