

# Tummy Time and Corrective Positioning Techniques for Babies



As a caring parent, you play an important role in your baby's physical development, and tummy time is an essential part of that journey. Tummy time and proper positioning techniques help your little one strengthen their neck and shoulder muscles, encouraging the important milestones of rolling, sitting, and crawling. By integrating these techniques into your daily routine, you can prevent or discourage flat head syndrome and ensure your baby grows up healthy and happy. Here you'll find practical tips and advice on how to make tummy time fun, engaging, and beneficial for your baby's development. Let's embark on this journey together, fostering a strong foundation for your child's future!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TUMMY TIME

Tummy time routines are the foundation for a baby's development. Babies tend to spend significant time on their backs due to sleep recommendations and seated carriers. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises parents to place babies on their backs to sleep, reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).<sup>1</sup> This is important to ensure safety for your baby. Additionally, many parents use car seats or carriers that keep babies on their backs, adding pressure on the head.

Your baby should experience time off their back and on their tummy during their daily routine while they are awake and supervised. Always stay with your baby during tummy time and vary their positions during the day to promote healthy development.

The benefits of tummy time include:

- **Muscle Development:** Strengthens neck and shoulder muscles.
- **Prevents Flat Head Syndrome:** Helps avoid flat spots on the back of the head.
- **Encourages Milestones:** Builds muscles necessary for rolling, sitting, and crawling.

Spending a significant time in the same position can cause flattening of the head (plagiocephaly), which may be worsened by torticollis—a condition where tight or weak neck muscles cause the head to tilt to one side.

### Understanding Plagiocephaly and Torticollis

**Plagiocephaly**, often referred to as "flat head syndrome," occurs when an infant's head becomes flattened on one side due to sustained pressure.<sup>2</sup> **Torticollis** is a condition where the neck muscles contract, causing the baby's head to tilt to one side. Both conditions can often occur together and may require corrective positioning techniques and tummy time to help reshape the baby's head and improve neck muscle strength.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Safe Sleep, American Academy of Pediatrics, <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/safe-sleep/>

<sup>2</sup>Plagiocephaly, Cleveland Clinic <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/10691-plagiocephaly-flat-head-syndrome>

<sup>3</sup>Torticollis, Cleveland Clinic <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22430-torticollis>

Tummy time is important for all babies, and especially those with plagiocephaly and torticollis, as it helps strengthen neck, shoulder, and core muscles. It also promotes motor skills like rolling, sitting, and crawling. Tummy time and side lying create a natural progression toward rolling and crawling.

- **Start Early and Gradually Increase:** Begin tummy time when your baby is awake and supervised. Start with short periods and gradually increase the duration as your baby gets stronger.
- **Make It Fun:** Engage your baby with toys, talk to them, and make eye contact to keep them interested. You can also lie down and place your baby on your chest for tummy time.
- **Use Supportive Props:** If needed, use a nursing pillow or infant lounger to provide additional support during tummy time.
- **Rotisserie:** Introduce movement and changes in position to your baby's day by rolling her from back to side to tummy.
- **Change Locations:** Move your baby to different areas to give them new things to look at and explore.
- **Engage in Tracking Games:** Slowly move a large toy to make a baby look left, right, up and down. Circular motions are encouraged as well to build eye muscles.

Let's further explore positioning options for your baby throughout the day.

## HOLDING POSITION OPTIONS

A baby's routine takes up many hours throughout the day. For this reason, it is important to vary head positions and positioning throughout the day.



### Football Hold

Hold the baby along your forearm, with their head resting in your hand and their body along your arm. The baby's legs tuck in close to your side, resembling how a football is held. Move from one side to the other to introduce movement.



### Cradle Hold

This classic position involves cradling the baby in your arms. The baby's head rests in the crook of one arm, while the other arm supports their body. Alternate your arms and place your baby slightly on their side to relieve pressure on the flattened side of their head.



### Tummy-to-Tummy Hold

Lay your baby on your chest while you are lying down. This encourages your baby to lift their head and look around, promoting neck muscle strength.



### Shoulder Hold

With the baby upright, rest their head on your shoulder. One hand supports the baby's bottom, and the other hand supports their back. Switch shoulders and the side of the head your baby is resting against your shoulder.



### Hip Hold

Once the baby has good head control (typically around 6 months), you can hold them on your hip. Place the baby astride your hip and wrap your arm around their back for support. Switch hips to keep your baby looking in both directions.

## CARRYING POSITION OPTIONS

- **Forward Facing:** Hold and carry your baby facing away from you. This allows them to turn their head to watch what's happening around them.
- **Belly Down:** Carry your baby belly down, supporting their chest with one arm. Younger babies need their head and chest supported, but as they grow stronger, they will need less support.
- **Shoulder Carry:** Carry your baby over your shoulder, gently supporting their head in a centered position. Alternate shoulders to encourage your baby to turn their head to both sides. As your baby gains strength, they will need less support to control their head and trunk.
- **Alternate Hips:** Position baby on your hip facing toward you. Regularly switch the hip your baby straddles. This encourages them to look, turn, and balance to the right and left, helping to develop neck muscles evenly.



- **Side Switch:** Carry your baby facing away from you on one side (e.g., right side), then switch and carry them on the opposite side (e.g., left side). This promotes balanced muscle development on both sides of their neck.

## PLAY POSITION OPTIONS

- **Chest-to-Chest Tummy Time:** Lie on your back and place your baby on your chest facing you. This encourages them to lift their head to look at you. Gently turn your baby's head to both sides. As they grow, they'll need less support and will start centering their head and pushing up on their arms.

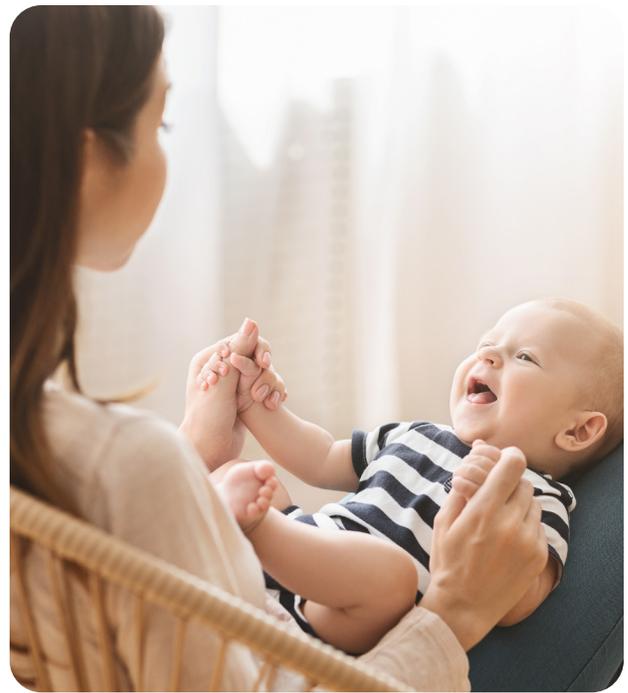


- **Floor Play:** Play with your baby on the floor. Place toys on both sides to encourage them to turn their head and reach with both hands. Playing together helps your baby become more comfortable around other people.
- **Lap Time:** Position your baby over your lap, raising one of your legs to make it easier for them to lift their head.

- **Use a Pillow or Towel:** Place a small pillow, towel, or blanket under your baby's chest. This helps them lift and center their head.
- **Floor Sitting:** Sit on the floor with your baby. Play with toys positioned in the center and to each side.
- **Engage Your Baby:** Engage with your baby during wakeful periods. Use toys, mirrors, music, and your own voice to encourage them to turn their head in different directions, promoting balanced muscle development.
- **Tummy Play with Toys:** Place toys in front of your baby while they are lying on their belly. This encourages them to reach and play with both hands. Your baby may prop up on their arms and move around the floor or crawl from this position.
- **Tummy Time Overlap:** While watching TV or visiting with friends, put your baby on their tummy over your lap. Change your baby's position to help them look to both sides.
- **Airplane Game:** As your baby's strength increases, play "airplane" by holding and supporting them as if they are flying. This is a fun way to help them develop neck and trunk muscles.

## GENERAL POSITION OPTIONS

- **Interactive Lap Time:** Change the way your baby watches you by ensuring their head is centered rather than tilted to one side. Place your baby in your lap facing you. Engage in activities like singing, making eye contact, snuggling, and gently centering their head as needed. To further enhance their balance, tip their body slightly to each side; your baby will naturally recenter and gain strength.
- **Stimulating Play Environment:** Place fun and interesting mobiles or toys on both sides of your baby to encourage them to turn their head in both directions while on their tummy or back. Regularly switch the side your baby lies on, even if they show a preference for one side.
- **Cuddle Time:** Hold and cuddle your baby often. Instead of leaving your baby in carriers or swings for extended periods, carry them in different positions to provide varied support and stimulation.



## DIAPER CHANGING

- **Vary Positions on the Changing Table:** Position your baby differently on the changing table each time they are changed. Roll your baby from side to side as you fasten the diaper tabs. This encourages movement and reduces the risk of developing flat spots. Engage with your baby by talking to them from different sides during the diaper change.
- **Face-to-Face on the Bed or Floor:** Change your baby's diaper on the bed or floor with them facing you. This positioning helps keep your baby's head centered and promotes eye contact, which is great for bonding and muscle development.
- **Tummy Time After Diaper Changes:** After changing your baby's diaper, roll them onto their belly before picking them up. Let your baby play in this position for a few minutes while supervised. This extra tummy time contributes to neck and shoulder muscle strengthening.
- **Interactive Play:** Incorporate some interactive playtime during diaper changes. Use toys or sing songs to engage your baby and encourage them to turn their head in different directions. This keeps them entertained and promotes balanced muscle development.
- **Use Gentle Movements:** During diaper changes, use gentle and varied movements. This can include softly lifting their legs or rolling them slightly to either side. These movements help in evenly distributing pressure on your baby's head.
- **Comfortable Surface:** Ensure the changing surface is comfortable and supportive. A soft, padded changing mat can help reduce any pressure points on your baby's head.



## DRESSING AND BATHING

- **Tummy Time During Changing:** Towel dry and change your baby while they are on their belly. Gently roll them from side to side as you put on their clothes to encourage neck muscle development and prevent flat spots on the head.
- **Post-Bath Massage:** Massage your baby from head to toe after diapering and bathing. This soothing practice not only relaxes them but also helps with muscle development and flexibility.
- **Use a Soft, Padded Surface:** When dressing or changing your baby, use a soft, padded surface. This ensures comfort and minimizes any pressure on your baby's head.
- **Interactive Dressing:** Engage your baby with toys or songs while dressing them. This can encourage them to move their head and neck in different directions, promoting muscle balance.
- **Alternate Dressing Positions:** Frequently change the position in which you dress your baby. For instance, sometimes dress them while they are lying on their back, and other times while they are on their tummy. This variation helps in evenly distributing pressure on their head.
- **Gentle Movements:** During dressing and bathing, use gentle movements to roll and reposition your baby. This helps them get used to different positions and reduces the risk of developing flat spots.
- **Encourage Reaching and Turning:** While your baby is on their tummy, encourage them to reach for toys or look at interesting objects on either side. This promotes neck muscle development and helps prevent flat head syndrome.

## BOTTLE FEEDING

- **Alternate Arms During Feeding:** Change the arm you hold your baby in for feeding. This encourages your baby to look and turn to both sides, which helps develop neck flexibility on both sides and reduces pressure on the back of their head. Feed your baby in one arm, then switch to the other side for the next feeding.
- **Supportive Feeding Position:** Sit with your back supported and knees bent. Hold your baby against your legs, facing you, and keep their head centered while feeding. This position allows for good eye contact and balanced head positioning.
- **Upright Feeding:** Consider feeding your baby in an upright or semi-upright position. This can be particularly useful for bottle-feeding and helps reduce pressure on the back of your baby's head.
- **Engage During Feeding:** Talk, sing, or gently play with your baby during feeding times. Encouraging them to move their head and follow your voice or actions can help with muscle development and prevent flat spots.
- **Use a Nursing Pillow:** A nursing pillow can help maintain a comfortable and supportive feeding position. Ensure that your baby's head is not resting on the same spot for extended periods by frequently adjusting their position on the pillow.



## BREAST FEEDING

- **Cradle Hold:** Hold your baby with their head resting in the crook of your arm. If you're feeding from the left breast, cradle your baby in your left arm. Ensure your baby's body is turned completely towards you, tummy to tummy, so their mouth is aligned with your nipple.

Your forearm should support your baby's back, and your hand should hold their bottom or upper thigh. This keeps your baby close and secure. Your baby's ear, shoulder, and hip should be in a straight line, ensuring they are not twisting their neck.

- **Cross-Cradle Hold:** Place your baby across your body, tummy to tummy, with their head at your breast. Use the arm opposite to the breast you are feeding from to support your baby's head and neck. For example, if you are breastfeeding from the left breast, use your right arm to support your baby. Use your hand to support the base of your baby's head and neck. Your baby's head should be tilted slightly back, allowing their nose to be clear and their chin to be pressed into the breast. Ensure your baby's ear, shoulder, and hip are in a straight line. This alignment helps your baby latch on effectively and feed comfortably.
- **Football Hold:** Tuck your baby under your arm on the same side as the breast you plan to feed from. Your baby's nose should be at nipple level, and their body should be facing your breast and extend along your arm towards your elbow. Ensure your baby's legs are tucked under your arm and their feet point toward your back. Use your hand to support the base of your baby's head and neck. Once baby latches, make any necessary adjustments to ensure both you and your baby are comfortable. Your baby's ear, shoulder, and hip should be in a straight line.
- **Side-Lying Position:** Lie down on your side and place your baby on their side, facing you. Bring your baby close to your breast. Their nose should be level with your nipple. You can use your arm to

cradle your baby's head or place it under your own head for support. Once your baby is latched, you can use your free hand to support their back and keep them close to you. Some mothers find it helpful to place a rolled-up towel or small pillow behind their baby's back to provide extra support.

- **Alternate Sides During Feeding:** Switch the breast you start feeding on each time. This helps develop neck flexibility and ensures that both sides of your baby's head get equal pressure.



## BURPING

- **Over-the-Shoulder Burp:** Hold your baby upright, place them against your chest with their chin resting on your shoulder. Use one hand to support your baby's bottom and the other hand to gently pat or rub their back. Alternate shoulders and the direction your baby's head faces.
- **Sitting on Your Lap Burp:** Sit your baby upright on your lap, facing away from you. Support their chest and head with one hand. Gently lean your baby slightly forward, supporting their chin and jaw with your thumb and fingers, making sure not to press on their throat. Use your other hand to gently pat or rub your baby's back in an upward motion.
- **Tummy Down Burp:** Place your baby across your lap, with their tummy against your thighs. Ensure your baby's head is turned to the side and slightly elevated above their body. You can use one hand to support their head. Alternate the direction your baby's head faces. This position not only aids in

burping but also provides a little extra tummy time, helping to strengthen neck and shoulder muscles.

- **Walking Around Burp:** Hold your baby upright, facing outwards, with their back against your chest. Use one hand to support your baby's bottom and the other hand to gently pat or rub their back. Walk around gently to help the movement release any trapped air.
- **On Your Arm Burp:** Lay your baby face-down along your forearm, with their head supported by your hand and their legs straddling your elbow. Use your other arm to support your baby's body and keep them secure. Gently pat or rub your baby's back with your supporting hand.
- **Varied Burping Positions:** Alternate between different burping positions, such as over-the-shoulder and across-the-lap, to prevent consistent pressure on one part of the head.

## SLEEPING

- **Back Sleeping Position:** Always place your baby on their back to sleep. This is crucial for preventing sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Alternate the direction your baby lies in the crib every other night. For example, one night have their head at one end of the crib, and the next night at the opposite end. Keeping a calendar by the crib can help remind you to change their direction regularly.
- **Alternate Head Position:** Turn your baby's head to the opposite side each night while they sleep. This helps avoid constant pressure on one spot and prevents flat spots from developing.
- **Use a Firm Mattress:** Ensure your baby sleeps on a firm mattress with a fitted sheet. This provides proper support and minimizes the risk of developing flat spots.
- **No Pillows or Soft Bedding:** Keep the crib free of pillows, soft bedding, and stuffed animals. These items can increase the risk of SIDS and create uneven pressure on your baby's head.
- **Avoid Extended Time in Car Seats and Carriers:** Limit the time your baby spends in car seats, swings, and carriers. Extended periods in these devices can contribute to flat spots on the back of the head.

## WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Some babies may experience flattening or asymmetry of their heads despite engaging in active tummy time. If you notice persistent flattening of your baby's head, if they favor a certain head position, or if they show signs of limited neck movement or tightness in neck muscles, consult your pediatrician. Your pediatrician may refer you to Hanger Clinic's specialized network of Cranial Asymmetry Remolding Experts.

If needed, they will create a helmet called a cranial remolding orthosis that will be worn by your baby to gently help shape their head to have a more symmetrical appearance. From lightweight, easy-to-use 3D solutions to more traditional options, Hanger Clinic embraces numerous FDA-regulated designs to help create a precise and comfortable fit for your little one.



**CARE NETWORK**  
Cranial Asymmetry Remolding Experts

Whether your baby needs some extra tummy time, repositioning, or helmet therapy, there is a lot that can be done to correct the asymmetry. That is why we established the nation's largest and most prestigious network of Cranial Asymmetry Remolding Experts, known as the CARE Network.

With over 200 certified orthotists specializing in cranial care at more than 260 locations across the country, the Hanger Clinic CARE Network follows a set of validated, research-based Clinical Practice Guidelines so you can rest assured your baby is receiving the most clinically accurate and unbiased treatment recommendations. Rest assured, with the CARE network you have access to unparalleled care and expertise from the nation's top clinicians.



**Find a Cranial Asymmetry Remolding Expert Near You**

Scan the QR code to find a cranial asymmetry remolding expert near you.

[https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/safe-sleep/?srsltid=AfmBOopkd-b7dnsZPVf4XPsjSvoO-Tow6SiZS96J\\_o7AON\\_rRzu0xc](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/safe-sleep/?srsltid=AfmBOopkd-b7dnsZPVf4XPsjSvoO-Tow6SiZS96J_o7AON_rRzu0xc)  
<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/neurosciences-site/Documents/BCCH034PlagiocephalyCliniciansGuideWeb1.pdf>  
<https://www.choa.org/-/media/Files/Childrens/teaching-sheets/tummy-time-tools.pdf?la=en&hash=FB0742A334A9D68762D26BF4AA1E93F06DE07621>

