



What to Know Before You Go: Planning for Tummy Time Activities in Home Visits



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Early Childhood Health and Wellness

School Readiness Begins With Health

Key messages

- Tummy time gives babies a chance to stretch and strengthen their muscles, including the ones needed for pushing up, rolling over, crawling, and walking, and helps babies to develop social-emotional and problem-solving skills, balance, vision, and hearing.
- As a home visitor, you can partner with families to find ways to include tummy time in daily routines and activities.
- Tummy time provides a special opportunity for caregivers to bond and interact with their baby.

Tummy time and the home visitor

As a home visitor, you have many opportunities to observe and learn about families in ways that others don't. This can provide you with a window into the real-life circumstances and needs of the families in your care. Your close relationship with families can be especially helpful when it comes to promoting tummy time and identifying opportunities to integrate tummy time into daily routines. Another important perspective you bring is the ability to assess a family's home to ensure that tummy time activities and environments are safe.

What is tummy time?

Tummy time simply refers to the time that babies spend awake and playing on their stomachs. Recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), tummy time activities should always be supervised by an adult.

Tummy time is important for babies.

A thoughtful and intentional approach to tummy time is important for several reasons.

- It gives babies the chance to practice and master important physical skills, like lifting and supporting their head, turning it, and holding it steady.
- It helps babies develop strength in, and control of, their neck, shoulders and back. This helps babies get ready for rolling over, crawling, pulling up, and, later, walking.

- It provides a great opportunity for one-on-one time for babies with their important caregivers, which promotes secure attachments and early social-emotional and communication skills.
- It allows babies to develop a round head. Babies who spend much of their day on their backs may develop a flat spot on the back of their head.
- It gives babies a different perspective from which to see the world, which supports exploration and cognitive skills.



Strategies to engage families in tummy time activities

1. Review motor development guidelines.

Plan to share the important connection between tummy time and the baby's mastery of later physical skills. Key motor milestones (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) resources from the AAP) include

1 Month

- Moves head from side to side while lying on stomach
- Focuses 8 to 12 inches (20.3–30.5 cm) away
- May turn toward familiar sounds and voices

3 Months

- Raises head and chest when lying on stomach
- Follows moving objects
- Turns head toward direction of sound
- Supports upper body with arms when lying on stomach
- Stretches legs out and kicks when lying on stomach or back
- Opens and shuts hands
- Grasps and shakes hand toys

7 Months

- Rolls both ways (front to back, back to front)
- Sits with, and then without, support of her hands
- Supports whole weight on legs
- Reaches with one hand

12 Months

- Crawls forward on belly by pulling with arms and pushing with legs
- Creeps on hands and knees, supporting trunk on hands and knees



2. Review the safety guidelines around tummy time.

Sometimes, families have concerns about placing their child on the floor for health, hygiene, or practical reasons. In these situations, you can help families to adapt tummy time to their specific home environment. You could

- Remind parents that their baby must always be supervised during tummy time.
- Help families identify alternate floor coverings, like a flat blanket, clean floor mat, or butcher paper, that may make the floor surface a safer, more usable space for their baby.
- Work with families to identify alternate locations for tummy time, if needed. For example, you could help adults to set up a hard or stiff bed, crib, or mattress with a tightly fitted sheet. Tummy time can take place on this surface, if it is a relatively hard surface and the baby is well supervised by an adult.
- Remind families that, while tummy time is important for healthy development while babies are fully awake, babies should always be placed on their backs to sleep.

3. Consider the strengths and needs of the particular family you will be visiting.

- If this is a family you have already been working with, think back to your last visit with them. Did they mention (or did you observe) activities or routines they especially enjoy with their baby? Could these be adapted to include some tummy time?
- If you have visited the family before, think back to where they live. What aspects of the home environment support tummy time play? What potential challenges or safety issues exist in this environment that may hinder tummy time activities?



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