

Gross Motor Play with a Purpose

0 - 3
MONTHS



Starfish Therapies

Welcome



At Starfish our favorite part of what we do is helping our kids find opportunities for fun AND work. Play is, after all, their job! Sometimes though it can be hard to know what type of play is right for the moment, especially when they're really tiny. We've helped many a new parent through that struggle and want to help you now! Read on to learn about play ideas and positions that will purposefully support your baby's gross motor development to get them primed and ready for their next stage. (Check out our next edition for 3-6 months old when you get there!)

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Tools and Toys

- Contrast black and white toys
- Rattles
- Mirrors
- Boppy pillow
- Musical toys
- Small balls or rubber rings that are grippable

Check out our [Amazon store](#) for our favorites options!



General Tips and Ideas

- Expose your new baby to different textures. Let them play with their onesie on and onesie off!
- Vary the position you hold them in – ideas [here](#)!
- Alternate which direction they face when they sleep and feed to facilitate symmetrical head and neck development
- Floor time is the best time!
- Check back regularly: [Developmental Milestones Round Up](#) has all the tips and tricks for each milestone as your baby grows and learns!

Key Terms

Prone:



Lying on the stomach

Supine:



Lying on the back

Sidelying:



Lying on their side

Flexors: used to refer to the large muscle groups in the front of the body that work to bend the body bringing hands, feet, knees, chin etc. towards the middle. Think of curling up in a ball and that's what these muscles do! You can see an example in the picture to the right. This is what's called "physiological flexion" in newborns.



Flexors at work!



Good Morning
Extensors!

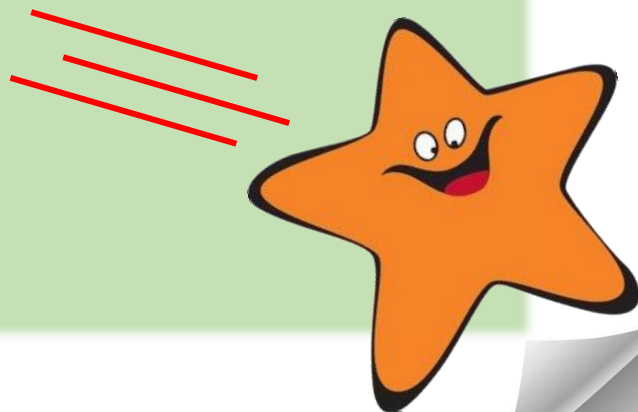
Extensors: opposite to the flexors, these muscle groups are in the back and they work to keep the body elongated and straight

Tactile: sensation of touch and feel

Auditory: referencing sound of any kind

Visual: any input to their vision

0-1 Month



Tummy Time

Tummy time is their main occupation right now. That and sleeping! Work on lots and lots! Even from day 1. Try these tips for success:

- Use small, frequent bursts!
- It'll help consistency if you find a way to work it into the daily routine: after each diaper change, after every nap, etc. ([see our sample tummy time schedule](#))



- Try positions such as:

[Skin to skin on your chest](#)

- Elevated on boppy pillow
- Football hold over your forearm
- Check out our video [here](#) for demonstrations and tips!

Even though your little one is itty bitty and probably only spends short bursts on their tummy, you will reap the benefits when they're older by using this time to try different play activities and identify motivators! Some fun things to try while baby is prone are:

- Softly humming or singing
- Show them their face and/or your face in a mirror
- [Rub/tickle](#) their back and bottom! This will also wake up those muscles enticing them to wiggle and squirm



Supine

Predominantly babies sleep in this position. When they are sleeping, try and make sure that they spend equal time with their head turned to each side to help avoid flat spots. When they're awake, it's play time!

- Similarly avoid flat spots and start working those neck and eye muscles with visual tracking practice
 - Use toys with high color contrast or noise makers
 - Get baby's attention first, then slowly move the toy side to side making sure they follow
 - Expect this to be a challenge at this age! [Here's a benchmark](#) of this little guy at 4 weeks. He catches it with his eyes early on but doesn't follow it yet. That's ok! Practice and exposure is what feeds progress!
- Wrist and ankle rattles give great feedback as they stretch and [move](#)



Sidelying

Because of [physiological flexion](#) your baby may just naturally end up on their side sometimes. Take the opportunity!

- You can use a pillow to support their back
- Read a book or use a mirror to entertain
- Try and place toys between their hands [like so](#)



A Note on the Importance of Tummy Time

The Back to Sleep movement has been so important to infant safety and health but has also contributed to increased frequency of “flat head” syndrome (brachycephaly or plagiocephaly) and less time spent on the tummy. As important as Back to Sleep is, Tummy to Play is equally essential!

Achieving early gross motor milestones such as rolling and crawling depends on having strong muscles in the neck, trunk, and shoulders which all develop during tummy time. Though it may be hard to tell, [the wiggling and struggle](#) that you see in your baby while on his or her tummy is setting the foundation for future stability and mobility. All of this is initiated way back at day 1 by spending supervised time on their tummy.



It is easy to talk about the importance of tummy time and how it supports gross motor development but it's not always so easy to implement. It is important to recognize that your baby may not tolerate it simply because it is hard! Think of tummy time as a gym session for your baby. It's important to persevere and work on that tolerance! Short bursts for only a minute or so at a time is a start. Check out a sample schedule in the next page. The earlier you start, the sooner they'll adapt! Hopefully you'll find lots of information in this book but if you need more support check out our [wellness program](#) geared towards developing tummy time. Self-paced and therapist led options are open!



Sample Tummy Time Schedule

Help yourself by working it into the daily routine to maximize your baby's opportunities and minimize your brain demand. There's so much to keep track of already, make this a habit and take it off the mental checklist!



Time it with diaper changes! Can you even count how many of these you do a day?! There will be so many opportunities to get 1 or 2 minutes in.



Take advantage of “active” awake time (usually right after a nap!). Start with tummy time because it's so hard. It will give you more time to work with and therefore more opportunities for short bursts.

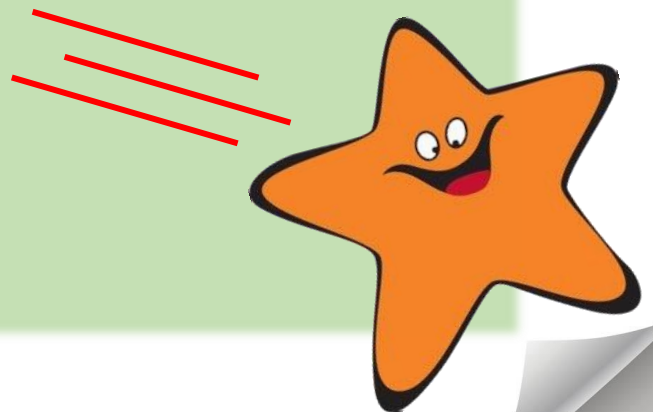


Working in some tummy time just before eating is a great solution for babies with reflux!



Schedule it with bath time! Or any other time you might be putting on lotion or oil. Lay them on their belly while you rub it in!

1-2 Months



Tummy Time

You will likely find your baby more active now and see them turning their head side to side while on their tummy as in [this video](#). They'll also be getting more vocal and more opinionated. But don't lose faith! Consider these additional tips for success:

- Distraction is key to tolerance! Try some of these ideas:
 - Get [face to face](#)
 - Speak encouragingly and often. Even copy their sounds! Mimicry is very intriguing during this stage of learning



- Read books. Black and white contrast pages are still highly engaging for their developing vision!
- Use toys with feedback including rattles and musical items



- Try on the floor, over a towel, or [on a boppy](#)
- Make it a habit and it will become easier for both you and baby!

Supine

In every position there is an opportunity for learning and developing. Babies thrive on feedback from their environment and in response to their actions for this learning. Check out these activity ideas for providing feedback while your baby plays on their back.

- [Activity centers with dangling toys](#) provide sensory feedback. Look for an activity center that has some or all of the following features:
 - Visual attractions – bright, colorful, sometimes moving/spinning
 - Tactile pieces – various textures and materials
 - Auditory engagement – parts that rattle, wrinkle, or make music
 - Check out some good options on our [Amazon store](#)!
- You can promote and encourage more reaching by taking out some of the gravity – try [propping them on a boppy pillow](#)!
- Keep facilitating visual tracking in all directions: side to side, up and down, even try diagonals! Try this with:
 - Wiggling fingers on your hand
 - Shining a flashlight on a surface in front of them (~8-10 inches away)
 - Your own face or a mirror. Make silly faces, talk to them, or sing and make noises!
- Tickle baby on their belly! It works to wake those muscles up and [prime them for play](#). It can also be a great opportunity to expose them to different sensations and textures. Try:
 - Tickling a soft feather on their skin
 - Gently rub a washcloth or a fabric like satin or velvet on their skin
 - See what they think about gentle strokes on their head and shoulders



Sidelying

Like tummy time this is a challenging position requiring babies to balance their flexors and extensors. And, like tummy time, distraction is key. Some engaging ideas include:

- Spinning, rattling, or dangling toys [facilitate reaching](#)
- Get face to face
- Use a mirror
- Read books or sing songs
- Work in small increments as you do with tummy time
- Check out more ideas in our sidelying post [here!](#)



The Forgotten Position

Sidelying is a great positional option for babies. It's a transition position for rolling initially and later for getting from lying into sitting.

Babies can work on balancing their flexor (front) muscles and their extensor (back) muscles as well as coordinating reaching and playing in midline. It provides an opportunity to free up their head from pressure reducing risk of flat spots and will help promote separation of their upper and lower bodies during rotation. The list goes on and on but this position is *rarely* discussed. [Let's bring it back in style!](#)

Supported Sitting and Standing

Let's get your baby learning about gravity, balance, and weight acceptance. Some parents wonder when it is ok to start these activities. With enough support start it early!*

- Provide lots of support around chest and trunk
- In sitting, you know you have enough support when their heads are safely in neutral as in this picture. (Not falling back or hanging forward)
- Sit them on your lap or on the floor in front of you
- Couch corners offer support options that allow you to face your baby!

PLAY!

- Sing Songs!
- Read Books
- Play in a Mirror
- Entertain with visually and sound stimulating toys
- Work on head control with [these exercises](#)



- In standing:
 - Babies have a [natural reflex](#) from only 1-2 weeks old to accept weight into their feet
 - By the time they've reached 1-2 months, this reflex and weight acceptance may look like [bouncing](#)!
 - Support them around their upper body by wrapping around their chest under their arms

* In typical development situations. If health or musculoskeletal concerns exist in your child, consult your doctor or PT

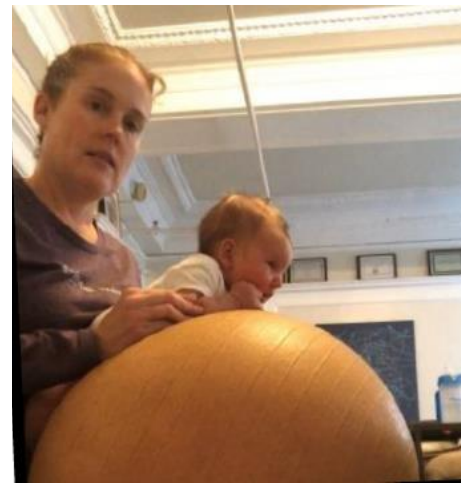
2-3 Months



Tummy Time

As your baby is getting older and stronger you'll see them being able to hold [their head for longer periods of time](#). With all of the time they've spent practicing sidelying and supine in the last few months you may also see some uncontrolled exploration of rolling to and from their side. Take advantage of this and start helping them roll into their tummy time practice! Try some of these other ideas also:

- Continue to get on their level, face to face
- Increase the challenge by putting them on a [therapy ball](#)!
 - The dynamic surface offers challenge and diversity
 - Play with rolling forward or backwards to find the right amount of gravity
 - Use your chest to give them more support if needed
- Head control is made easier by [propping on their elbows](#)
 - Start with their elbows behind their shoulders
 - Help stabilize them at their elbows or upper arm here
- Practice [more visual tracking](#) in this new position!



If you notice that your child isn't looking as frequently to one side or won't look as far in one direction as they do to the opposite side they may benefit from a [physical therapy evaluation](#) to determine the underlying cause.

Supine

With your baby getting stronger, they'll be moving more freely on their backs now. Check [out this clip](#) to see some of the kicking and reaching babies could be doing at this point. You can compare that with [this clip](#) and see how much freer and more frequent his movements are with just 2 weeks of practice! Try out some of these new play ideas:

- Activity gyms still provide great play areas
 - Lots of toys to reach for
 - Or turn them around so their feet are under the arch and they can [kick the toys](#)!
- Musical play mats or jingle socks are good for kicking also

Sidelying

Your baby will be getting more independent in maintaining the position without support. Activity mats can be fun here also to [encourage reaching](#) against gravity and reaching to midline.

Sidelying is the perfect position to start working on rolling. From this position they might start to roll forwards onto their stomachs or backwards onto their back. Rolling onto their back generally is first. Their head will lead the way so try having them to track your face or a toy over their shoulder until they roll back onto their back.



Supported Sitting and Standing

Keep baby's play positions diverse! Variety is so helpful in building strength but also in other areas of development like problem solving, sensory processing, motor planning and more! It encourages them to continually try new strategies to achieve success, learn from their efforts, and be adaptable. They're young but their brains are like little sponges right now! To assist the diversity, mix in some sitting and standing.



With sitting:

- You'll still need to hold them around their trunk but they'll be giving you much more assistance in holding themselves up!
- This is a good position to:
 - Read stories
 - Make silly faces in the mirror
 - Babble with baby

Even mix in some variety *within* sitting. With the proper supervision, try:

- Sitting on the floor in front of you
- Reclined sitting in the couch corner
- Reclined in a basket that supports their back propping with pillows and blankets
 - ➔ In some of the positions that are hands free you can work in head control exercises like looking up to find a noisy or visually appealing object

In standing:

- You'll notice that they're [standing with much straighter legs!](#)
- They should tolerate weight through their legs for more than a few seconds now!



Well Done!

Big pat on the back for all of the hard work you and your child have put in over the last 3 months! No one says it's easy but we hope we've helped to make it fun! Sometimes though you need an extra support system. We're here! If you want more support and resources contact us to talk to one of our experts:

Starfish Therapies

(650)638-9142

admin@starfishtherapies.com

www.starfishtherapies.com



Resource Party

Coming
Soon!

Next edition of purposeful play ideas and positions for [3-6 months!](#)

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