

Tummy Time

When should we start?

How much do they really need?

I feel so bad when my child cries!

No matter what, my child hates it!

My baby has reflux

Guide to starting or improving your child's ability to position on tummy

Oh tummy time! We are here to tell you that if you or your baby dread tummy time, you are not alone! This is your baby's first work out and is truly a lot of work. We have gotten tons of questions about this and used those conversations to help us make this guide. First things first, when can you start tummy time? Right away, granted no medical complications or precautions placed by birth/medical team. We outlined how to start at beginner level and build difficulty over time in hopes that it will make starting right away less daunting. You may already be doing a beginner version of tummy time without realizing it. We hope this guide helps increase your knowledge and confidence to kick-start your child's gross motor development and work through any challenges that come along the way!

[Tummy Time Amazon Toy List](#)



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Week 1 – Elevated Tummy Time

Elevated tummy time is a great first step and involves using an elevated surface to help reduce the gravitational force your baby has to work against. This can be done in a variety of ways and level of difficulty!

Level 1

Let's start with the easiest approach – performing on your [shoulder or chest](#)! Sit down and recline back or lay down with your head/trunk propped on pillows. Position your baby belly down against you.

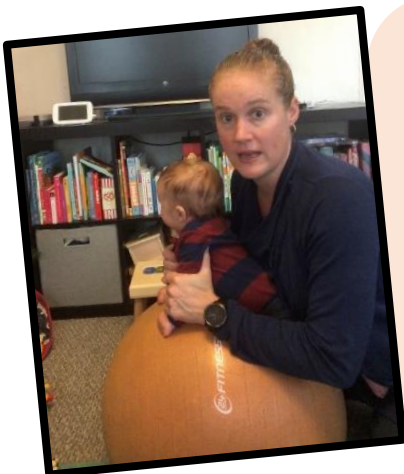


Level 2

The next level of difficulty would be performing over a [pillow or Boppy](#). The higher your child's head is compared to their feet/legs, the easier the position is.

Level 3

As your child improves, lower the support they are on. The next step would be performing over a [towel roll](#). Continue to work down towards having their belly directly on the floor. Do not worry if you progress too quickly, your baby will let you know and you can simply return to a higher support and take it more gradually during your next attempt!



Other options:

- Place them on their belly on a therapy ball and start with them rolled back so they are more upright
- Check out this [blog/video](#) for more options!

Elevated tummy time can be great for babies with [reflux](#) as being more upright can decrease symptoms and make being on their belly more tolerable

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Week 2 – Head Lifting/Turning & Visual Tracking

Visual tracking is a fancy term to describe your child looking around at their surroundings. It is helpful for gross motor development and early strengthening as it often the driving force behind a child lifting their head against gravity and working to look to each side while on their tummy.

One of the easiest ways to work on this is [getting down to your child's level](#) to use their desire to interact with you as motivation to fight gravity and start building strength in the back side of their body. Make sure to position just as often on each side to assure equal opportunity to tracking/turning head right and left!



As your child's neck and upper back get stronger, you will see him or her lift higher and/or hold longer. You can also use [visually stimulating toys](#) to guide your child to look each direction while head is up.

Working on [head lifting/turning](#) and visual tracking can be done in any tummy time position including the elevated positions described last week!

Toys we love for this:

- Baby Play Mat Activity Centers
- Sassy Wonder Wheel
- Mirror
- Rattles

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If you notice that your child isn't looking as frequently towards one side or won't look as far in one direction compared to the other they may benefit from a physical therapy evaluation to determine the underlying cause of this

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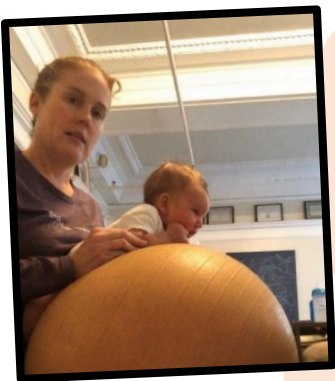
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Week 3 – Forearm Prop

Forearm prop is when the arms come in and your child starts to push off the ground through elbow/forearm. Propping on forearms starts the development of your child's shoulders and arm musculature. It also challenges and subsequently improves your child's head control and neck strength.

Elbows/forearms may start behind shoulders/tucked in towards the tummy or even [out to the side/in front of the body](#). Then as your child's strength and endurance improve, the elbows/forearms progress to be more [under the shoulders](#).

This is a position you can easily help facilitate. While your child is positioned on their belly, bring your hands in along the sides of your child's arms and help them bring theirs in. Keep your hands there as your child adjusts to the new position. With your hands supporting the arms/shoulders, the focus for him or her is the head. If your child is keeping the head up, looking around, and overall tolerating the position, you can back off the support you are giving.



All the above can be done on the ground or in a modified/elevated position as mentioned in previous weeks (on boppy, pillow, against you reclined, or on a ball)

Check out this [prone propping and pushing up blog](#) for more!

Let's check in on the legs!

Does your child seem to prefer keeping their knees up and bent while on tummy?

Check out this [blog post](#) for more details!



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Week 4 – Reaching On Tummy

Once your child is more comfortable being on tummy and is lifting their head to look around, the next step is reaching. To start to encourage this, place an item on the ground a couple inches from one of their hands. In order to reach for it, your child will have to shift some weight off that arm to allow it to move forward.



At first your child may just inch their fingers/hand forward or slide their arm forward on the surface, but over time you hope to see a greater shift in their weight and reach with hand/arm up off support. (Some kids may get creative and just pull the toys closer to them!) Make sure to present items just as often to each side and include presenting directly in front to try to elicit both hands coming together to interact with it.



How can I help?!

If it seems your child needs a little help to get it started, you can assist them with the weight shift. Similar to a suggestion given in week 3, place your hands along the sides of your child's arms, help them bring theirs in so they are propping on their forearms, and direct more weight to the arm opposite the side with the item.

How do I add more challenge?!

If your child is doing great with reaching items on the ground, elevate the item. For example dangle it a few inches off the ground so not only do they have to reach forward but also up!

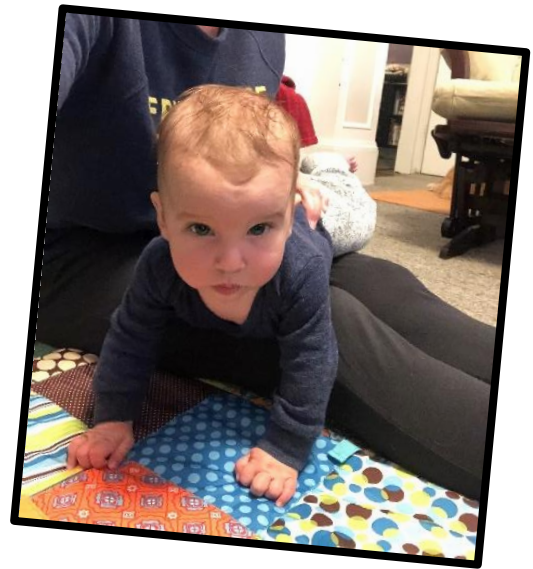
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Week 5 – Push-up Over Support Surface

Now we are going to start working on straightening those arms to lift more of the upper body off the ground. Using a boppy, pillow/cushion, or your [legs](#) are all great surfaces to start with. Position your child on belly over this surface such that head is beyond the surface and hands can touch and plant on the ground below. The surface takes care of the weight of the trunk and lower body while your child focuses on weight bearing through hands and strengthening shoulders and arms.



Once they seem to have a handle holding the position with both hands down, challenge them to reach with one hand similar to the approach described in week 4. The challenge now is to hold majority of weight on one side while maintaining the elbow straight.

How can I help?!

- Help direct the weight shift as previously described
- Help keep the elbow straight by placing your hand on the outside of your child's stabilizing arm
- Check out this [video](#) for ideas

How do I add more challenge?!

- Position your child so more of their body is forward off of the support
- Present or dangle the item higher or further away

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Week 6 – Prone Push-up



Your child has done a lot of work leading up to this! Now it is time for your child to [push up](#) to the extent that elbows are straight. Push up onto extended elbows is an important precursor for rolling and crawling.

Placing toys up on a slightly elevated surface can help with getting your baby to push up onto those elbows - notice how we are again using visual tracking/gaze to facilitate movement!

You may notice your baby will alternate between straight elbows and

maintaining their forearms on the floor and that is okay! This is typical and occurs while they are still working on developing the necessary strength and endurance to maintain a full push-up for longer periods of time.

Once they are maintaining this position it's time to encourage [weight shifting and reaching](#). You are an expert at this by now!



What you may see during this practice...

- Inconsistency – it's a part of learning!
- Occasional frustration – encourage first and if needed make the situation a little easier, but do give your child a chance to work through it!
- [Rolling on accident](#) – great start to rolling on purpose!

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**Congratulations to your new tummy
time master and to you for your
patience getting them there!**



Before



After

As your baby gets stronger and stronger, you may see them start to combine all they have practiced to achieve more movement by [pivoting](#) on their tummy! Here is a [video](#) on how you can help!

Our next program is focuses on rolling, check it out if you are looking for more!

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