



Five Moves for Baby's First Workout

Did you know even newborns need to work out? Just a few minutes a day, a few times a day, can help your baby get used to “tummy time” and help prevent **early motor delays**. Babies often complain about being placed on the tummy, but if you begin early (even from just a few days old) and maintain a consistent schedule, it will become a part of their daily routine that can improve neck, trunk and shoulder strength.

Here are the top five moves for your baby which you can begin as soon as the baby is born:

1) Tummy-to-Tummy

Enjoy some together time with your newborn. Lie down and place your baby “tummy-to-tummy” or “tummy-to-chest.”

While lying tummy-to-tummy, **make sure to keep your hands on your baby at all times to keep her from rolling off**. A newborn won't be lifting her head yet, so alternate your baby's head position to the right and left to prevent your baby from developing a preferred head position.

Even before your baby lifts her head, lying on your tummy or chest can help strengthen your baby's back and neck muscles; eventually she will try to lift and turn her head to look around.



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2) Eye-Level Smile

Babies love your face and voice. Change your position to encourage head movement.

Baby is trying so hard to lift his head and turn towards mom! **Stay on the same level as your baby, even getting down on the floor.** Voices are also great motivators. When your baby is on his tummy, talk or sing to him.

Also, change your position to encourage head movement. Get in front of your baby to encourage head lifting, and move to each side to encourage head turning. If you notice your baby prefers to hold his head turned to one side, try to do more activities that encourage head turning to the opposite side.

If this head position is not changing and becomes the position of preference, bring this up with your pediatrician or health professional.



3) Lap Soothe

Lay your baby tummy down across your lap to settle him down instead of holding him upright on your shoulder. Make sure to provide support over the baby's bottom to provide a sense of security and a soothing touch.

Baby also enjoys tummy time on mom's lap. This position strengthens both the neck and back muscles, which are not active while your baby is on his back. **Note how mom has one hand on her baby's bottom** – this is both to keep him from rolling off and to give him a feeling of security.

It's very easy to fall into a habit of positioning babies in the same direction, but switching things up is very helpful for muscle development, so alternate between placing the baby's head and chest over your right and left knees. This position is also great for calming fussy babies!



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4) Tummy-Down Carry

When carrying your baby around the house, carry her tummy-side down instead of upright.

Again, this position helps build neck and back strength. Mom is supporting baby with one hand between the legs and under the tummy, and her other hand supporting baby's head and shoulders. Practice holding your baby in different directions, to both the right and the left. **Baby should be nestled against mom or dad's body.**



5) Tummy Minute

Start to incorporate tummy time into your daily routine, such as placing your baby on her tummy for one or two minutes every time you change her.

Here, mom is using a toy and a rolled-up receiving blanket tucked under baby's chest and upper arms to prop him up. Once your baby starts to expect tummy time, he may not protest so much!

As your baby grows, slowly increase the amount of tummy time per day, aiming to get an hour total of tummy time by the end of three months. **This shouldn't be all at once, but in spurts throughout the day.**



Make tummy time play time!

Sing songs, respond to the sounds your baby makes, and offer new sounds and different expressions to help baby latch on to your face. When you take time to play with your baby on her tummy, you not only help **strengthen her body**, but you **build a bond** with her and support **socialization skills**.



Finding Time for Tummy Time

Sometimes, a whole day can fly by before you realize that your baby hasn't had time for tummy time!

Make tummy time a fun part of your day by incorporating the “Five Moves” and these additional ideas during routine activities like dressing, bathing, diapering, feeding, and sleeping. Not all of these ideas have babies on their tummies, but taken together, these positioning suggestions help babies get some freedom of movement, encourage head turning, build muscle strength to help feeding, and can help prevent flat spots on babies' heads.

1) On the Go

Parents and babies are constantly on the go, and with car seats that also serve as baby carriers, you might find that your baby is spending hours in the same position. Ideas to help:

- Think ahead about ways to remove baby from her car seat when you reach your destination. Bring a blanket or a pad to lay her down, or move her to a different carrier, like a stroller or sling.
- Use a car seat that has a curved head support to keep baby's head upright. If your car seat did not come with one, use a rolled up blanket or towel to keep baby's head from leaning to one side.
- Do not place pads or cushions under or behind your baby while he is in the car seat; this could compromise his safety.



2) Quiet Time and Nap Time

As the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends, babies should always be put to sleep on their backs to reduce the risk of SIDS. However, even during quiet times in the crib, there are ways to promote head turning.

- Change the direction your baby faces during sleep; you can even keep track of this on a chart near the crib (visit www.pathwaysawareness.org/sleepchart for a downloadable PDF).
- When you put baby down to sleep, position your baby's head to opposite sides. If baby's head is consistently to one side only, **please bring this up with your pediatrician or health care professional.**
- Place mobiles and toys in different areas of the crib to support head turning. It's best to keep toys at chest level or below rather than right over baby's head; this promotes chin tucking, which aids with development of the muscles that help in feeding.



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3) Changing Baby

You dress and change your baby many times throughout the day, and each time is ideal for incorporating different positions. Try the following:

- Switch baby's position on the changing table or change her someplace else, like on the floor or on a bed. Stand on either side of baby or approach her near her feet. This will encourage baby to change her head position as she learns to fix her gaze on you.
- When changing a diaper, instead of holding baby's feet up by the ankles to remove a diaper, roll baby's knees up to her tummy and maintain that position with one hand while you remove her diaper. This gives baby a little stretch in her back muscles.
- Towards two and three months, for a challenge, roll knees up toward the tummy and chin and hold them while doing some gentle side-to-side rocking.
- After bath, place baby on her tummy to dry her; you can also soothe her with a little massage.



4) Feeding Time

It's easy to fall into a pattern when feeding a young baby. Switching things up not only helps his muscle development, it could help you avoid muscle aches as well!

- When using a bottle, switch the arm you use to hold your baby each time. This allows your baby to turn to both sides which develops neck flexibility and helps prevent flat spots.
- Another bottle feeding position: recline on a sofa with bent knees, putting your feet on a footstool or ottoman. Feed baby by placing him on your thighs, facing you. This will encourage your baby to keep her head centered.
- As your baby begins eating solid foods in a bouncy seat or high chair, sit in front of her and bring the spoon up from her chest level to her mouth. The small movement of your baby tucking her chin to watch the spoon encourages head and neck control and facilitates better swallowing.



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