



Wee Learn

Wee Beginners (0-18 months): Muscle Stretching Exercises for Infants



During the first year of life, you need to help your baby's muscles develop so those muscles will be better able to perform tasks as your child ages. Exercises for stretching can be done during play, and are a good way for you to promote muscle development while spending quality time with your infant.

Tummy Time. Tummy time can offer your infant the opportunity to stretch and strengthen muscles at the same time. Time spent on the tummy promotes flexibility of the spine while strengthening the muscles of the back. Tummy time also allows your child to engage in exercises that will help roll over and crawl. To promote even more stretching during tummy time, hold a rattle or other enticing toy in front of your infant, just out of their reach. This exercise will promote flexibility of the shoulder and upper back.

Leg Stretches. While your baby is lying on her back, help her with hip and knee range of motion and flexibility by engaging them in bicycle kicks. Take one foot in each hand, and guide her legs in a circular motion like when pedaling a bike. Be gentle and keep the pressure light. Next, try the "toes to nose" stretch to promote lower body flexibility. With your baby's feet in your hands, gently bring the toes to your baby's nose. Some babies feet might not reach -- don't force it.

Arms and Shoulders. To promote flexibility of the upper body, try this chest stretch on your little one. Begin with your baby lying on her back and encourage her to grab onto the thumbs of each of your hands. Next, bring your babies arms out wide, and then back over so they are crossed over the chest. Repeat this exercise several times and don't exert too much pressure or force your baby into any movement that she can't do willingly.

Hands and Feet. Your baby's hands and feet are so tiny that it can be easy to forget that they contain muscles that need to be stretched. Babies tend to grasp their hands tightly, so stretching them can be tricky. Encourage your baby to pick up toys on her own, and choose toys that have a variety of colors and textures to keep your baby's interest. Take advantage of muscle stretching opportunities while your child is sleeping by gently massage the muscles in her hands and feet. Doing this will not only help stretch those tiny muscles, but will also help promote blood flow and circulation.

