



Why Do I Need a **TUMMY TIME** Class for My Baby?

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As an Independent Certified Baby Signs® Instructor, one of the classes I offer from our On the Grow™ Program is a tummy time class. I get asked this question often because people don't realize how our changing society has affected tummy time.

Tummy time is one of the most important developmental stages for babies and if they don't get enough there can be delays in babies sitting up, crawling, walking and even brain development. Parents are told right from the beginning to be sure their baby is getting enough tummy time but are often given no real specifics on how much is enough or what to do when it turns out their baby hates tummy time! This is where a class can help.

Created from the Original Baby Signs® Program founders, Dr. Linda Acredolo and Dr. Susan Goodwyn, the information provided has been well researched. A few signs are included in the class to peak signing interest but the class offers great information and several tricks that help keep baby enjoying or at least tolerating tummy time.

Do you remember the “Back to Sleep Program?” That was created in 1994 to teach parents to lay babies on their backs (instead of their tummies) to sleep more safely. In just a few years the reports of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) was reduced by 50%. Tummy time wasn’t an issue back then because babies were already used to sleeping on their tummies so being put on them during the day was well tolerated. Today not only are babies not used to being on their tummies, they also spend a large portion of time in car seats, bouncy seats, carriers, etc. with very little time spent on their tummies. When they are put there they often fuss and parents cave too soon. No one wants to see their child uncomfortable or stressed but parents don't always know what problems can arise if a baby doesn't get enough time on their stomachs.

Two things can happen when babies spend too much time with the weight of their head always at a favored angle (positional torticollis) or against a flat surface like a bed (plagiocephaly or flat head). Torticollis is when the muscles on one side of the neck become so short that the baby can no longer easily hold it's head upright much less lean to the other side. Ever woken up with a stiff neck after sleeping funny? That hurts! I imagine Chiropractors cringe when they see pictures of babies sound asleep in their carriers with their heads all the way to one side with no support around the neck. Plagiocephaly can happen when the still-growing skull spends too much time in one position. The human skull is made up of five bones with fibrous tissue connecting them. That means they can shift out of position and actually cause the head to change shape.

Tummy time gives the head a rest and starts developing the neck, arm and shoulder muscles needed to push up and continue progressing all the way to walking.

With so many things going on just taking care of baby's basic needs, it's easy to miss these two conditions developing until they are difficult and expensive to correct. Our society has changed so much with technology and even how we carry babies now that problems like these can sneak up on us. No one is expected to know everything and often grandparents (good or bad) are not close by but help is all around parents now who want to be informed and ask questions. Here is a great place to start: Safe to Sleep Public Education Campaign - <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/Pages/default.aspx>

From the first week parents should be putting their baby on their tummies for a few minutes several times a day with that time increasing as they grow. In the beginning the baby will still be very curled up but their limbs will begin to stretch out as they progress. By three months a baby should be able to lift up their chest and keep their hips down. By six months your baby should be enjoying tummy time and have a lot more motor control to keep them from falling over accidentally.

Here's more on what babies can do each month up to a year: <http://nspt4kids.com/parenting/tummy-time-the-first-year-a-month-by-month-primer-north-shore-pediatric-therapy/>

Hopefully this answers the question "Why a tummy time class?"

Happy parenting!

Tina Cavanaugh

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For information on Tummy Time classes in the Austin, TX area along with other classes taught by Tina Cavanaugh, see her website: www.babysignsbytinac.com.