

# Tummy Time Progression Guide

Age-based progression with troubleshooting for babies who resist

## Why Tummy Time Matters

Tummy time builds the neck, shoulder, core, and back muscles your baby needs for every motor milestone that follows — rolling, sitting, crawling, and walking. It also prevents positional plagiocephaly (flat spots) and promotes visual development by encouraging babies to track objects across midline.

## Progression by Age

AGE	DURATION / FREQUENCY	POSITION & ACTIVITIES	WHAT TO EXPECT
0-2 weeks	1-2 min, 2-3x/day	Chest-to-chest on parent (reclined). Skin-to-skin counts.	Baby may simply rest head to one side. No lifting expected.
2-4 weeks	3-5 min, 3-4x/day	Chest-to-chest or on firm surface. Place black-and-white high-contrast cards at eye level.	Brief head lifts (1-2 seconds), turning head side to side.
1 month	5-10 min total/day	Firm surface with rolled towel under chest if needed. Get face-to-face with baby.	Head lifts to 45 degrees momentarily. Arms tucked under body.
2 months	15-20 min total/day	Flat surface. Dangle colorful toys, use mirrors. Try lap tummy time (baby across your thighs).	Head lifts to 45 degrees and holds briefly. Begins pushing up on forearms.
3 months	20-30 min total/day	Place toys in a semicircle. Introduce a water mat or crinkle book. Side-lying play as a complement.	Lifts head to 90 degrees. Weight-bearing on forearms. May begin reaching for toys.
4 months	30-60 min total/day	Place toys slightly out of reach to encourage pivoting. Try tummy time on your shins (airplane).	Strong head control at 90 degrees. Pushes up on extended arms. Pivots in a circle.

AGE	DURATION / FREQUENCY	POSITION & ACTIVITIES	WHAT TO EXPECT
5–6 months	60+ min total/day	Use a Boppy or rolled blanket to prop. Offer toys requiring two hands. Play on varied surfaces (grass, blanket).	Lifts chest completely off surface. Reaches with one hand while weight-bearing on the other. May rock on belly or begin commando crawling.

**KEY**

All durations are cumulative daily totals. Split into as many short sessions as your baby tolerates. Even 30 seconds at a time counts for a newborn.

## Troubleshooting: Baby Hates Tummy Time

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	SOLUTIONS
Screams immediately	Unfamiliar position; weak neck muscles; possible reflux discomfort	Start on your chest instead of the floor. Keep sessions under 1 minute. Try after a diaper change when baby is alert but calm — never right after feeding.
Face-plants and gets frustrated	Not enough strength to lift head yet	Roll a small towel and place under armpits/chest for a slight incline. Use a nursing pillow. Try side-lying as a gateway position.
Only tolerates 30 seconds	Normal for newborns — muscles fatigue quickly	Do many micro-sessions throughout the day (10–15 sessions of 30–60 seconds). Gradually increase as strength builds. Celebrate small wins.
Turns head to one side only	May indicate torticollis or positional preference	Place toys and your face on the non-preferred side. Alternate which end of the crib baby sleeps at. Mention to pediatrician if persistent past 2 months.
Spits up during tummy time	Gastric pressure on full stomach	Wait at least 20–30 minutes after feeding. Use a slight incline (towel roll or pillow). Keep sessions shorter after meals.
Refuses after previously tolerating	Developmental regression, teething, illness, or new awareness	Revert to an easier position (chest-to-chest). Introduce a new motivating toy. Try a different surface or location. It's a phase — keep offering gently.

## Tummy Time Alternatives That Still Count

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- Chest-to-chest (skin-to-skin) – Recline at 30–45 degrees. Great for newborns and fussy babies.
- Lap tummy time – Baby face-down across your thighs while you gently pat or rub their back.
- Football hold carry – Carry baby face-down along your forearm. Builds neck and core strength passively.
- Side-lying play – Not a full replacement but strengthens similar muscle groups and is a good bridge.
- Tummy-to-tummy in the bath – Supported by water – reduced gravity makes it easier for reluctant babies.
- Babywearing (facing in) – Upright carrying in a structured carrier builds head and neck control.

### IMPORTANT

Always supervise tummy time. Never leave a baby unattended on their stomach. If baby falls asleep during tummy time, gently roll them onto their back.