

Emerge



A Child's Place

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Occupational Therapy
Speech Therapy

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Bonnie Hacker, OT
Founder / Director

Tummy Time Promotes Healthy Development

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) began promoting recommendations for infants to sleep on their backs in 1992. While their "Back to Sleep" program resulted in a 40% decline in sudden infant death syndrome (SID),¹ it may have also inspired an overreaction among America's parents. Adherence to the AAP's supine sleeping recommendations seems to correlate with limited prone (on tummy) activity when awake.²⁻⁴ For infants, prone activity creates exercise necessary for normal development.

Since widespread adoption of "Back to Sleep" recommendations, infant obesity has been on the rise.⁵ Increased prone activity for infants has been recommended as part of the solution.⁶ Beginning in 1992, the number of deformational plagiocephaly diagnoses (positional skull deformities) has risen dramatically. One medical center observed a six fold increase in the number of infant head deformities from 1992 to 1994.⁷⁻⁹ Recent research has correlated supine sleeping patterns (on the back) with skull deformities in infants. However, supine sleeping for infants in itself probably does not directly cause skull deformities. Rather, the cause may be associated behaviors among parents such as our societal over reaction and restriction of prone activity. Adequate tummy time for infants predicts a much lower incidence of skull deformities.^{10,11}



Most importantly, the reduction in prone activity over the past 16 years seems to be affecting the motor development of our children. Majnemer and Barr recently found that only 22% of their sample of healthy 6-month-olds could sit without arm support even though, historically, 50% of 6-month-olds have been able to do that.⁴ Multiple, peer-reviewed studies now show strong correlation between inadequate prone activity among infants and failure to meet developmental motor milestones.^{2-4,12} Infants with inadequate prone activity showed difficulty with extended arm support, hands to feet in supine, sitting, and other motor milestones. One study followed infants as far as 15 months of age and found that difficulty with motor performance persisted.³ The extent to which these motor performance difficulties persist into the school years or adulthood is unknown.

Tummy Time at Emerge: Physicians now modify the sleeping instructions for infants to say "Back to Sleep. Tummy to Play." This is to emphasize the fact that supine is only preferred for sleep and there can be such a thing as too much time on the back. Some parents have a harder time implementing this advice than others. Infants who are not accustomed to having tummy time may protest and resist the effort and distress the parents. Parents are welcome to make an appointment with a pediatric occupational therapist at Emerge. Our expert therapists can provide one-on-one Tummy Time consultation with parents and explore strategies in developmentally appropriate play, optimal Tummy Time surfaces, timing, scheduling, gauging the emotional reactions of the infants, etc.

In addition, Emerge is working toward a **Tummy Time class for groups of infants and parents**. This fun filled class will give infants socialization with other infants and healthy exercise while parents learn Tummy Time strategies to help healthy children with optimal motor development. Call for dates and more details.



**Please tell parents about Emerge – A Child's Place
Believing in a Child's Potential to Flourish**

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