

Inner Power Hypnobirthing

Babies need 'tummy time' to develop

Each night little Isobel Nash is placed to sleep on her back. Beverley, her mother, is well aware that placing Isobel on her tummy to sleep could increase her risk of cot death.

But every day Isobel also gets **"tummy time" - a period of the day set aside specifically for her to lie on her stomach.**

Physiotherapists are warning however, that more and more children are missing out on this special time, and their development is being stunted.

Play

Statistics show 19% of mothers with children under six months old never put their babies on their fronts to play and only 22% regularly give their babies "tummy time".

Peta Smith, vice chair of the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP), said that since the Back to Sleep campaign, which urged parents to place their babies on their backs to sleep, they had noticed fewer babies were getting protected "tummy time".

She said this had resulted in a delay in these babies reaching important developmental milestones such as crawling and walking.

"Research shows babies placed on their backs to sleep who were then placed on their front for extra time during the day were able to roll, crawl, sit, pull to stand and eventually walk earlier than those who were mainly placed on their backs," said Peta.

She added that although babies predominantly placed on their backs eventually catch up in their development skills, that the first few months of life are an important time for babies to start to become aware of their bodies and begin to learn movement and balance.

"By spending time on their tummies babies learn to move from side to side and this helps them learn to reach and crawl.

"Not only does "tummy time" help with coordination, balance and postural control, which is the foundation for all movement skills, it increases babies' confidence and independence helping them to become motivated to explore their surroundings as they learn to control their bodies."

Experiences

Positioning babies predominantly on their backs can mean they miss new experiences such as lifting their heads against gravity and learning to develop their arms by taking weight on them.

Physiotherapists warn that a baby spending too long in carriers, baby seats and swings can also be detrimental.

They recommend that mothers introduce "tummy time" from birth, two or three times a day

for a few minutes or longer, so they get used to lying on a different position. Peta warned that at first the babies, **who must never be left unattended**, may be reluctant to try a new position.

"Some parents say their babies do not like "tummy time" and that they cry, but our advice is designed to make "tummy time" fun."

She said placing mirrors and colourful toys near the baby would encourage the baby to lift its head and that placing its favourite toys just out of reach could encourage stretching and movement.

Joyce Epstein, Director at the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths agreed that **babies should have more "tummy time" while awake, but stressed they must always be placed on their backs to sleep.**

"Babies who do not sleep on their back have a nine times increased risk of cot death.

"However, when babies are awake they should spend time on their tummies - not always flat on the back. This aids their healthy development."

Position

Isobel Nash, who is now four months old, was two months premature and because she needed oxygen her mother worried about laying her on her front.

But Beverley, from Kent, said that with the help of Peta she had been ensuring her daughter had "tummy time."

"It is too early to tell whether it is doing any good as she has only been doing it a few days. "She did find it strange at first to be on her tummy.

"I had heard about "tummy time", but was not doing it. I did not realise there was such a link between always placing your baby on its back and missing out on development."

Plagiocephaly (flat head syndrome)

The most common cause for this condition occurring is lack of tummy time (waking time only). Please note this is a rare occurrence.

Health visitors and GPs in the UK are not uniformly experienced with, or knowledgeable about, plagiocephaly (flat head syndrome) and will often tell parents that the head shape will round out on its own as the child grows and as it spends less time on its back, or that future hair growth will cover it. They often, therefore, advise non-intervention. While mild cases often improve spontaneously over time, in severe cases, most parents prefer to undertake some kind of active treatment. So, by ensuring the baby has adequate tummy time, during waking hours, helps to prevent this condition from occurring, and can also be the cure if this condition should occur.

With compliments from Paola Bagnall