Tummy Time to Prevent Flat Heads

Since 1992, the American Academy of Pediatrics has advised moms and dads, and others who care for their babies, that all healthy infants be placed down for sleep on their backs. This decreases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) by as much as 50 percent.

Since that time, there has been an increase of children with flattened heads. Although sleeping on the back is still recommended for all healthy babies, playing on the tummy during waking hours is safe and also recommended, under supervision.

What will happen if my baby is not given time to play on her tummy?

- **Asymmetrical head shape** – This means that there is flattening of a portion of the head.
- **Developmental delay** – Children who do not play on their tummies learn to roll later than those who do play on their tummies.
- **Weakness** – Babies who do not play on their tummies show weakness of back and shoulder muscles.

How should my baby be positioned when she is awake?

- Your baby should be in a variety of positions throughout the day.
- Young babies enjoy being carried at their parent’s shoulder, in parent’s arms or facing outward.
- Infant seats are convenient for short periods. However, because babies are on their backs on infant seats, think about getting an infant front carrier.

My baby doesn’t like to play on her tummy. What can I do?

Use tummy time as playtime. Lie on the floor with them and sing or use bright toys. You can also have the baby lie on their tummy while on your lap or chest. If your baby fusses, try tummy lying for short periods of time in your arms or rocking. As the baby gets older, you can place toys in front of them and soon they will have fun reaching for the toys.

What else can I do to prevent a flattened head?

As soon as the baby is born, use position changes to prevent a flat head. When you lay the baby down to sleep on their back, one time lay their head to the right and the next time to the left.

What if my baby already has a flat head?

Using the various methods listed above, most babies improve after 2 or 3 months. If not, your baby’s doctor may send you to a pediatric neurologist, and sometimes a molding helmet is worn by your baby.

Tummy time is very important for your baby. If you have further questions, be sure to call and talk to your baby’s doctor.