

Question: I have tried giving my two-month-old baby “tummy time” by laying him on his tummy with some of his favorite toys, but he just doesn’t like it. He starts screaming right away. How can I make it more enjoyable for him?

Not all children like tummy time, especially at first.

Since pediatricians recommend that children be put on their backs to sleep to help prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), they also recommend that infants have some awake time on their tummies to strengthen their neck and back muscles and to learn to turn their heads.

Focus and Self Control: involves paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly, and exercising self control (not going on automatic, but doing what you have to do in order to pursue a goal). Children need this skill in order to achieve their goals, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload.

1

Be present and watch for signals.

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton of Harvard Medical School observed that infants—right from the moment of birth—are communicating. Your baby is communicating by screaming when you put him on his tummy. Brazelton also observed that babies’ communications can be complex. Not all screams are the same and there may be moments when your baby is acting differently. When adults learn to “read” the language of infants’ behavior and better understand what they are trying to communicate, we can parent them better. A key to helping your baby learn to like tummy time more is to read his behavior and figure out what works for him.

- **Ask yourself when your baby seems to like tummy time more than others.** Some babies may get interested in looking at toys while others may prefer looking and making noises back and forth with you. In each of these examples, you are helping your baby learn to pay attention—to focus.
- **Are there things that you can do that help your baby enjoy tummy time?** Is it when you:
 - Sing, smile, and talk while he is on his stomach?
 - Touch his hand or pat his back to let him know you are there?
 - Show him toys?

2

Provide time for practice and celebrate your baby’s successes.

Brazelton says, “Every time babies put themselves together in the face of stress or stimulation, they’re getting internal feedback that says, ‘You learned. You just did it!’ And if

they do it over and over, it becomes part of the equipment. When the adult reinforces these internal feedback systems, but doesn't take them over, we are giving that baby not only the chance to learn, but also a chance to experience the excitement of learning."

- **Give your baby a chance to practice for a very short period of time and then lengthen the time as he becomes better able to enjoy tummy time.** Focus and Self Control includes being able to work toward a goal. This is an example of Executive Function skills, which are driven by goals. Learning a new skill takes time and practice..
- **Start him on his back and then give him a few minutes on his tummy.** By giving your baby the chance to work and use different muscles in different positions, you are helping your child grow stronger and have a better sense of physical control over his own body.

3

Create a team.

Older siblings or other friends and family can help your baby get used to tummy time by lying down with him and playing, such as singing a song or talking with him. These interactions help babies develop the ability to pay attention and build trustworthy relationships.