National Survey of Pediatric Experts Indicates Increase in Infant Delays; More Tummy Time is Key

Research

A national survey of 480+ pediatric physical and occupational therapists, averaging over 25 years’ experience, confirms what early childhood medical professionals have been observing: two-thirds of therapists reported a rise in early motor delays in infants in the past six years, and who saw an increase said that lack of tummy time while awake is the number-one contributor to the escalation in cases. Tummy time is supervised time awake that babies spend on their abdomens. An early motor delay occurs when a child isn’t able to meet critical motor milestones in the first month and years of life, which can later affect a child’s ability to learn basic skills such as grasping, crawling, standing and walking.

The survey was conducted by Pathways Awareness, a national non-profit that educates parents and medical professionals about the benefits of early intervention for children who show delays in reaching early developmental milestones.

The survey was conducted with assistance from the Nevada Developmental Treatment Association (NDTA) and the Pediatric Section of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). The goal of this survey was to quantify the observations of these highly qualified pediatric professionals, as well as identify possible contributing factors to the increase in cases.

Back-sleeping “Container” Lifestyles May Contribute

The vast majority of babies now sleep in their basins to help prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The Back-to-Sleep campaign reduces the risk of SIDS by 44%, but also means that babies risk out on the 12 or so hours of tummy time they used to get each day. Back-sleeping, coupled with more awake time in “container” like car seats, bouncers and strollers, adds up to so much back time that babies aren’t able to develop their trunk muscles, contributing to the increase in early motor delays.

Why Tummy Time

New parents are concerned with the basics: feeding, eating, changing and nursing; they know that babies are spending more and more time on their backs, and the pressure on the infant’s brain can create a flattening of the back of the skull called posterior plagiocephaly. Tummy time and repositioning an infant are two easy preventative measures that can help reduce the chance a baby will develop plagiocephaly. Incorrectly positioned can lead to permanent deformation of the skull in some cases, which could lead to serious problems later in life. Asymmetric pressure which can lead to premature such as speech and voice issues.

4 Months Old

Baby often complain about being placed on their tummy, but Fortunately this is a brief period from just a few days up to a few months of their daily routine. Tummy time can improve head control, neck, back and arm strength, which are needed for the next stages of development.

Tummy time is critical for building muscle strength so a child can meet their developmental milestones. Suggestions for parents can include simple moves or putting their name while you face your baby with you, getting down to their level for more contact. In addition, it can help your baby learn to respond to their name, as they are more likely to look and listen to the person who is calling them.

Essential Tummy Time Moves

Top five moves to begin as soon as your baby is born:

1. Tummy time: Lay baby on their belly or on a firm surface, such as a towel, that’s been “seasoned” with all your baby’s favorite smells, as you sing or talk to your baby while it’s smiling or laughing.

2. Tummy time: Lay baby on their belly or on a firm surface, such as a towel, that’s been “seasoned” with all your baby’s favorite smells, as you sing or talk to your baby while it’s smiling or laughing.

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Survey Methodology, Select Questions and Results

The web-based survey was conducted between February and May 2008 by Pathways Awareness. Respondents were 499 highly qualified physical and occupational therapists who belong to the APTA or NDTA, who work with pediatric clients on a regular basis, and who average more than 20 years of experience. All results reported are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.