

# The Joys of Tummy Time



## What Does Tummy Time Really Do For Babies?

### How Nurseries Can Take Babies Outdoors for Tummy Time Every Day

Tummy Time is a crucial part of a baby's every day development. It is essential for developing and strengthening their muscles, and is key to helping them make the transition to crawling and eventually walking.

Many moons ago, when there were no such things as baby walkers and door bouncers to pin them into, babies spent much more time during the day on the floor, free to move their bodies without so much physical restraint.

Supervised time spent lying on both their backs and their fronts during most of the daytime, meant babies had the freedom to naturally move their bodies, develop strength and control in their muscles and awareness of the space around them.

In turn, they could soon navigate the floor for themselves, learn to crawl and choose where they want to go and explore next!

Too many physical restrictions, over use of so called "aids" and spending too long lying on their backs can hinder a baby's natural development and cause problems of their own. Time to take them out into the fresh air for regular Tummy Time.

Lying on their tummies, natural curiosity drives babies to look up to see what is around them. This strengthens their upper body and sets the groundworks for development of both gross and fine motor skills.

They roll over, support themselves with their arms, and start to move forwards and backwards.

It contributes to development of healthy sensory processing too, and as babies start to reach up or out, try to feel, touch and grasp interesting items nearby, it gives them some early practice with hand to eye coordination.

Current UK guidelines are clear that babies should sleep on their back. Due to the fact they spend so much of a 24-hour day sleeping (hopefully, although we know this isn't always the case!), it is important to mix things up while they are awake, put them on their front and make sure they get plenty of opportunity for stimulation and for strengthening those little muscles.

Tummy Time also helps to prevent the back of a baby's head from becoming flat. This is known as Positional Plagiocephaly, and results from babies sleeping on their backs and then spending too much "awake" time also on their backs.

Although usually temporary, some children who develop this condition require medical treatment such as wearing a special band or helmet around their head. This can be prevented if a baby is encouraged and supported to spend more time on their tummy while they are awake.



# Top Tips for Tummy Time

Tummy time is a really fun way to spend time with babies at nursery. It can be particularly rewarding for staff and key workers as much as parents, as they see babies develop and start to build the strength and confidence needed to push themselves up and move on to sitting and crawling.

Nurseries have a babies really important role to play in getting used to Tummy Time, and for some babies, nursery provides the most opportunity they get to do Tummy Time all day.



Tummy Time can include a variety of activities, positions, and routines. If you are new to Tummy Time, here's a quick recap on how to do it effectively:

- Only do Tummy Time when a baby is awake and alert and ready for play.
- Make sure the baby is on a firm surface, always on the floor or a low surface that they can't roll off. A firm mat is a good idea for a bit of comfort if needed. Play mats with colours, textures and lights can help.
- Position yourself in front of the baby or babies so that they can see your face for interaction and reassurance.
- Make it more fun by placing toys and rattles within the baby's reach. This will help them start to really enjoy playtime in this position. As the baby's upper body strength starts to develop, use a range of

different toys and move them gradually further out of reach so the baby has to work for them!

- Get down on the floor with the baby and talk or sing to them for entertainment and to help them feel good about Tummy Time.
- Often parents and nurseries report that very young babies dislike Tummy Time at first. This is normal and it doesn't last. If a baby really doesn't like Tummy Time, the most important thing is not to push it too far, and to start off with just a few minutes a few times a day, working up to 20 minutes twice a day.

You can use other really simple daily activities to back up Tummy Time. When carrying babies around the nursery, keep alternating which side you hold them on and hold them facing away from you.

This encourages them to look around, get a better view of the things that interest them, and strengthen their neck muscles as they do.

At snack time and lunch time, offer the baby food from the left, right, and in front of them, to encourage them once again to move their head and neck.

A number of nurseries that we have spoken to have talked of the practical difficulties they face in taking babies outdoors every day. But wherever you can, we would recommend that you find ways of taking babies outdoors for Tummy Time at least once a day. It's the best possible way for them to interact with nature and absorb all the many benefits of fresh air and natural daylight. Designing your outdoor space to accommodate and welcome babies is key.



# How Can Nurseries Adapt Their Outdoor Spaces To Provide a Safe and Stimulating Environment For Daily Tummy Time

Does the weather often prevent you from taking babies outside at your nursery? Or is it the case that the outdoor space just isn't suitable and going outdoors is too much of a logistical challenge?

That's where we can step in. Dare we say it, when it comes to outdoor Tummy Time for babies, there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad facilities.

For much of the year in the UK, if nurseries had to wait until the weather was pleasant enough to take babies outside, then it would rarely happen. But this doesn't have to be the case.

We recognise that your outdoor space needs to be an inclusive space that can be enjoyed by all your children, from young babies through to preschoolers.

Whether or not they use the outdoor space at the same time or on a rota is up to you, but it can be possible for all your children to enjoy the outdoor area at the same time if it is well designed.

We suggest that there are three main focus areas to consider if you want to transform your outdoor play area into a baby friendly paradise that's perfect for Tummy Time:

## 1. Suitable Ground Surfacing

Tummy Time invariably means putting babies on the floor. Is this an option in your outdoor space? Is the floor safe, clean enough and free from sharp stones or other materials that could hurt a baby's delicate skin?

There are some brilliant playground surfaces available that are perfectly safe for allowing babies to explore on their tummies and that make welcome alternatives to the dreaded concrete and muddy grass.

Our Saferturf is one such surface. It's a clean, dry and comfortable artificial grass which can be installed in a variety of colours, and even with bright and bold patterns that babies will love. It has a grass-like texture but without all the dirt, making it a practical and safe sensory surface for babies to explore.

You can lay down playmats for the youngest babies, and place baby toys and other items for babies to play with on Saferturf, without worrying about them getting dirty or damaged.

## 2. Weather Proof Shelters

Installing a permanent outdoor shelter is a must in this country. A space where babies can enjoy being outside in the fresh air and stay nice and dry if it's raining, warm and cosy if it's cold, and shaded from the sun on a baking hot day.

Obviously appropriate clothing is paramount, but for babies that's no good on its own if the weather is too extreme.

Outdoor play cabins can be made bespoke and installed to suit your outdoor space and size. They provide cosy and comfortable sheltered spaces with plenty of natural light and fresh air filtering through.

They offer a "safe place" for babies to look out onto the garden area and enjoy all the sensory experiences it has to offer, the sound of birds, the feel of a gentle breeze and all the different shapes, colours and patterns created by the effects of the weather.

But babies don't have to get cold or wet! You can dress the interior of an outdoor play cabin in any theme you want to create a stimulating or relaxing sensory space. Put blankets, play mats and tummy time toys on the floor. Hang brightly coloured pictures and mobiles, and create a beautiful outdoor Tummy Time space for babies that won't be affected by inclement weather.

Outdoor Gazebos are perfect for sunny spaces, offering shade from the sun and shelter from light showers. They can have open sides to offer babies a clear view of the garden, and allow loads of natural light in.

If the play area is also being used by older nursery children, gazebos can create a natural boundary, offering a safe option for babies to have their own allocated Tummy Time space without the risk of older nursery children running into or tripping over them.

The open sides mean that babies can look up to watch the "entertainment" of the older children having fun around them - they will soon be trying to join in! Gazebos can be installed onto Saferturf or have a



decked base to suit your requirements.

Den posts offer a really simple and attractive solution to creating shelter on hot days. You can hang sheets or sails from them to create a beautiful canopy that moves with the wind, creating movement and patterns of light on the floor.

Babies will be mesmerised as they push up on their arms to get a better view.

### 3. Sensory Stimulus

Once you have a good ground surface and appropriate shelter in place for when it's needed, you can have fun installing sensory items that will encourage babies to raise their heads and push up from their tummies.

There's now nothing to stop you from bringing all of a baby's Tummy Time toys outside.

Keep a box full of toys in an outdoor storage shed to save staff having to carry items in and out every day. For a really highbrow outdoor space that makes Tummy Time even more special, you could offer the following:

- A [Giant Wall Mirror](#), fastened to the wall at ground level, will really encourage babies to lift up their heads and push themselves up on their arms. Babies become fascinated with their own reflections and will love to see their own faces smiling back at them during Tummy Time!
- Connect babies to nature with some low level [Planters](#) filled with brightly coloured and different textured plants. Point out the leaves and flowers to babies as they lie on their tummies and encourage them as they push up or reach out for a closer view.
- Place babies on their tummies underneath a [Sensory Arbour](#). This will encourage them to lift their heads up, push up on their arms and roll over for themselves to see the beautiful light reflections and colour patterns and enjoy the gentle, melodic sounds all around them.



### How Do Babies Particularly Benefit From Tummy Time Outdoors?

#### Sleep

Recent studies have confirmed that babies sleep longer and better when exposed to plenty of natural light during the day, and particularly in the afternoon.

It is not known exactly why this is, but the afternoon is traditionally a time when parents would take babies out for a walk in the park, or (perish the thought!) leave babies out in the back garden to sleep or play. It may be that the babies are more active in the light.

Another explanation is that the stimulus of sunlight is what helps babies to establish their circadian rhythms, promoting daytime alertness and bringing on sleepiness at night time.

Sleep deprivation is a big problem for babies and their parents too, so if Tummy Time outside in the daylight helps everyone to get a good night's rest, then it has got to be worth a try!

#### Vitamin D

Babies need vitamin D for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. A lack of vitamin D causes bones to become soft and weak, which can lead to bone deformities.

Our bodies create vitamin D from direct sunlight on

our skin when we are outdoors. It is added to all infant formula milk and included in dietary supplements for babies too, but this isn't enough.

For most of the year, (given the opportunity) babies should be able to get most of the vitamin D they need from the sunlight.

## Improved Eyesight

Allowing babies and children to spend more time outdoors improves their vision as well as their general health, according to several recent studies.

Exposure to natural daylight can lower the risk of nearsightedness by regulating the rate of eye growth. And being outdoors naturally strikes a balance between the amount of near focus and long distance focus that the eye has to perform.

So it makes sense that Tummy Time should take place outdoors, in a space where daylight naturally filters through, and there are a number of interesting close up and long range objects for a baby to focus on.

## Cognitive Development

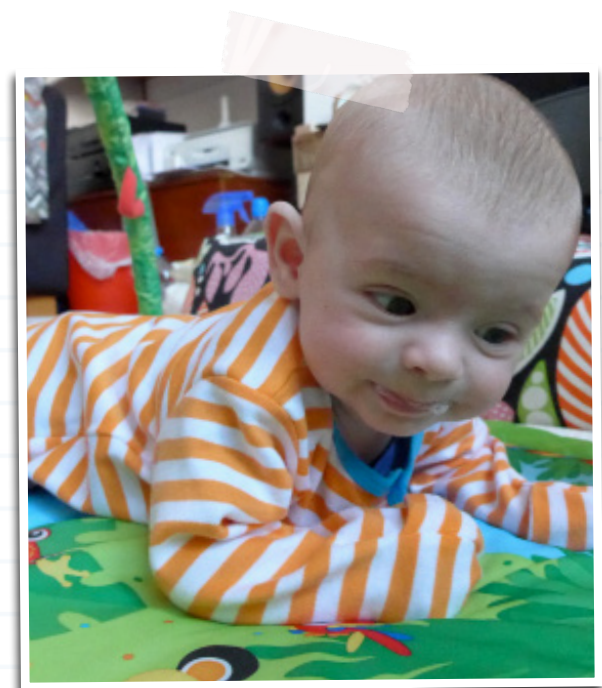
Babies are constantly trying to make sense of their world. One of the ways they do this is by soaking up every sight, every sound, every experience that they encounter.

They take this information and they come up with their own ideas about how the world works. So, plenty of exposure to the outdoors and all the different and wonderful sensory experiences that it offers, is critical for cognitive development.

Spending time in a natural outdoor environment is also soothing and has its own way of comforting babies.

It is clear, then, why nurseries would want to provide a stimulating outdoor environment for their babies to get the most out of Tummy Time.

To see our range of outdoor products designed with nurseries in mind, please visit the [Pentagon Play Website](#). If you are looking for new ideas to improve your outdoor space, we can help and we would love to hear from you.



To find out more about our unique process as well as view our entire product range, [case studies](#) and educational [blogs](#), make sure to visit our website at [www.pentagonplay.co.uk](http://www.pentagonplay.co.uk)