

Baby's head shape

Face time and tummy time equals head control



Newborn babies have large heads in proportion to the size of their body. Their heads are often shaped by the way they are positioned during pregnancy or during birth, but they can also change in shape in the weeks and months after birth. The head might develop a flat spot or a bulge. Babies may prefer to turn their head to one side. This fact sheet provides information and ideas about how to encourage your baby to develop head control in all directions and is important for protecting your baby's head shape.

Did you know?

- A newborn can follow your eyes or voice and move the head themselves
- Baby's head is heavy
- It is hard for babies to move themselves, so support their head with your hand
- From birth baby needs face time (face to face play) and tummy time
- Babies often turn their head to one side
- Turning to the other side may be difficult so they need help.

Head control

- Head control is balancing the head in all directions
- Babies hold their head up first with tummy time
- With baby lying on the back and facing you, use eye contact to encourage 'chin tuck' and lifting the head
- Later, baby holds the head steady when pulled up from lying on the back — usually by 3–5 months:
 - the legs might lift up too
 - and baby will play with the toes and feet.

Play

- Babies love to play! It is also a good way to bond with your baby
- Play is when baby is watching you do things, listens to you, or you move them:
 - keep play short
 - stop if baby closes eyes, blinks, turns away, is sleepy or crying.

Why?

- Newborn babies are not able to hold their head up themselves
- Babies have big heads and have to learn to hold their head up
- This fact sheet gives you ideas for getting babies to move themselves and not get a flat spot (plagiocephaly)
- There may be other benefits such as having a happy baby!

What can you do?

- Support newborn babies in the curled up position
- Choose your time for playing:
 - when baby is looking at you
 - after nappy change
 - in the bath
- Face time is when baby is directly facing you
- Eye contact is holding their gaze to:
 - imitate baby making mouth shapes
 - follow your eyes and turn the head themselves
- Tummy time — both you and baby must be awake — and can be done with baby:
 - lying on your chest
 - lying cross your lap
 - being carried on their front
- Eye contact as part of playing is good for bonding with your baby during face to face time
- All babies are different, some like to be close to your face, others further away.



- See your Maternal Child Health Nurse, GP, or Paediatric Physiotherapist if you are worried
- Sleep baby on the back from birth, not on the tummy or side.

Physiotherapy

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Face time plus tummy time equals head control

Birth

- Newborn 'curled up'
- Head heavy (gravity)
- Head may be turned
- Will follow eye contact or voice

Face time — baby on their back

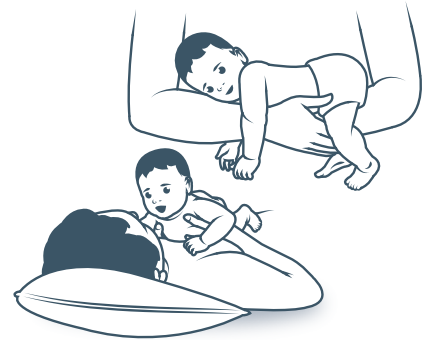
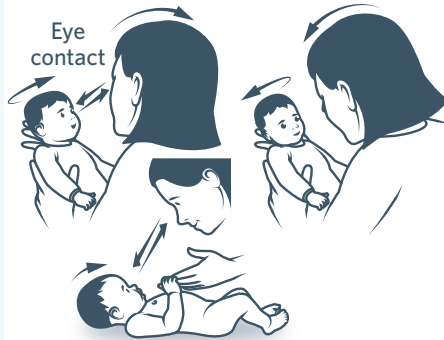


Tummy time — baby on their front



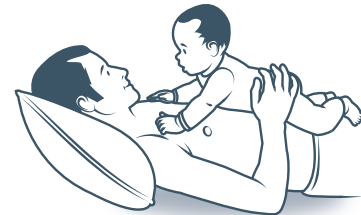
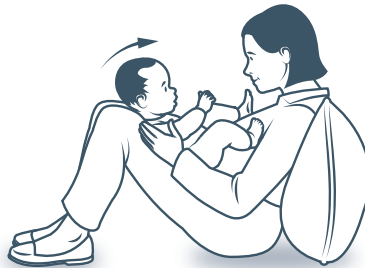
1 month

- Nodding movement, turn head one way then other
- Try to get hands together and may lift knees
- Baby develops 'chin tuck' and looks down (double chin!)



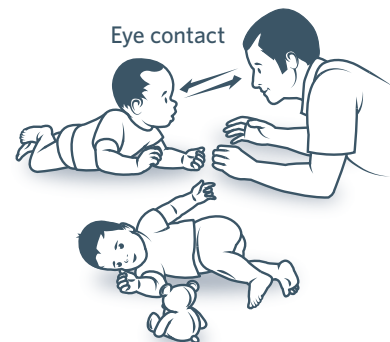
2-3 months

- Will play for longer
- Like to play curled up
- Enjoys games, song, clap hands
- Propping up helps lifting head towards you



3-4 months

- 'Pull to sit' holding hands — chin tucks in
- Knees and feet come up too
- Good fun after a nappy change
- Might roll to side reaching for toys



...and later

- Pushing themselves up
- Sitting with support and turn to reach over your leg for a toy
- And later they push up onto hands and knees

