

# Baby's head shape

Face time and tummy time equals head control



The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

**This fact sheet has ideas for developing control of head movements from birth to around four months.**

## Did you know?

- Even a newborn baby can move the head to each side by following your eyes, or a toy, or listening to your voice
- From birth baby needs both face time (face to face play) and tummy time
- It may be harder for babies with bigger heads or born early to turn or hold their head up, so support them
- Baby's head is heavy, so it will need support with your hand
- Babies often turn their head to one side
- Turning to the other side may be difficult so they need help
- Babies hold their head up first with tummy time
- Later they hold their head steady when pulled up from their back; their legs might lift up too
- Play is when baby is watching you do things, listens to you, or you move them:
  - keep play time short
  - stop if baby closes eyes, blinks, turns away, is sleepy or crying.

## Why?

- Most babies have a big, soft head
- Newborn babies have their head shaped by the way they were born
- A baby's head may change in shape after birth
- OR you may notice a flat or bulging spot on the head after a few weeks
- Newborn babies can move their head by themselves, but are not able to control it
- Babies with big heads or are born early may have more difficulty holding their head up.

## 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
- Tummy time can be when they are lying on you
- Face time can be in your arms
- Both face time and tummy time can be on the floor
- Look at their eyes (eye contact):
  - imitate baby making mouth shapes
  - get them to follow your eyes and turn their head themselves.



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

## Physiotherapy

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne  
 50 Flemington Road Parkville  
 Victoria 3052 Australia  
 TELEPHONE +61 3 9345 9300  
[www.rch.org.au/physio](http://www.rch.org.au/physio)



## Face time plus tummy time equals head control

Face time — baby on their back



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

Baby's tummy time — baby on their front



**Birth**

Head turns



- Baby develops 'chin tuck'
- Looks down (double chin!)
- Nodding movement, turn head one way then other
- May lift knees



**1 month**



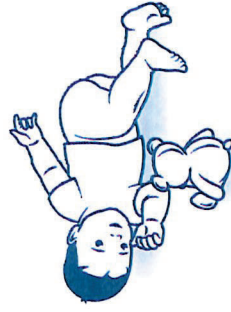
- Will play for longer
- Babies with bigger heads need support
- Like to play curled up
- Can lift head towards you



**2-3 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



**3-4 months**



- Pushing themselves up
- Playing with their feet
- Sitting with support
- And later they push up onto hands and knees



**...and later**