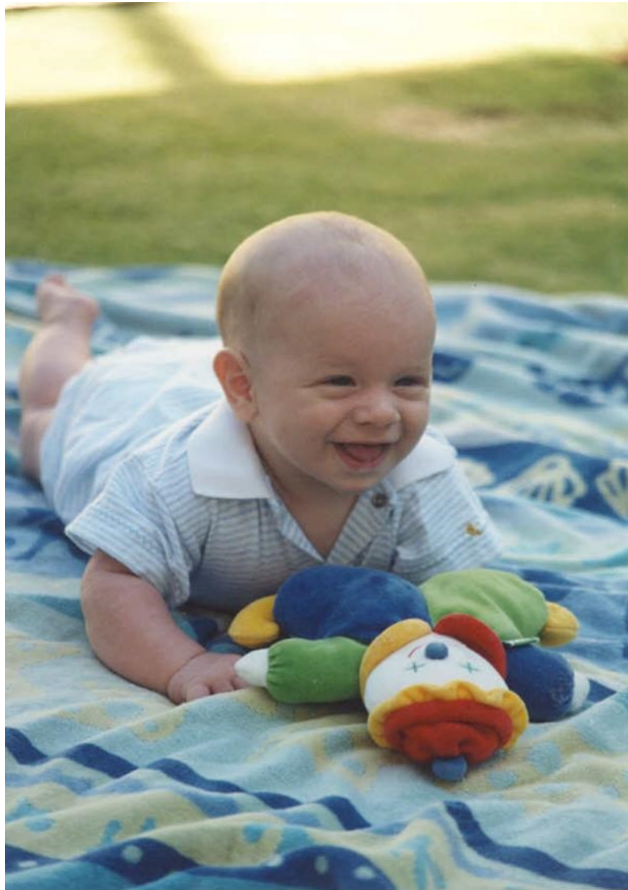


Parent Information

Developmental advice: Going home from NICU

Paediatric Physiotherapy
Liverpool Hospital



If you would like support with this information when you are ready for discharge please ask to speak to a physiotherapist, or phone us on 8738 5629.

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Congratulations on reaching the stage when your baby is ready to go home from hospital!

Once you go home, you will find that your baby will spend more time awake and ready to play. Here are some hints and tips to assist with your baby's development. All babies need a variety of positions for play and lots of practice to learn new movements and to build up strength in their muscles. Young babies spend a lot of time on their backs, but they should also be placed on their tummy and on their side to play.

All of the activities below will help to develop your baby's strength and assist your baby to move with normal movement patterns so that they will develop similarly to term babies.

Remember, it is important to consider your baby's corrected age. To calculate your baby's corrected age, start with their chronological age, that is, how many weeks they are from their actual date of birth, and subtract the number of weeks they were born premature.

For example, a baby who is 16 weeks old, and was born 12 weeks premature, that is, 28 weeks, is just 4 weeks corrected age.

Medical staff such as doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists will use corrected age when assessing developmental milestones until the child is 2 years old. It is important to correct for a baby's prematurity, this will allow for an accurate assessment of their developmental abilities.



Equipment

- ◆ Use different play positions throughout the day, for example, place your baby in a rocker or swing. Equipment should encourage and support your baby to bring their head and hands to the middle, it should help their shoulders forward and legs tuck up. Equipment is only to be used when baby is AWAKE.
- ◆ When your baby is becoming more alert and interested, floor time is the best way for them to learn to move.
- ◆ Do not encourage standing for the first few months at home as this continues to promote arching and extension patterns which will not help normal movement patterns. This is best left until your baby is older.



Equipment that is **NOT RECOMMENDED** includes:

- ◆ Baby Bouncers
- ◆ Baby Walkers
- ◆ Jolly Jumpers

These pieces of equipment do not encourage a curled up posture and they over strengthen the back muscles which encourage arching postures/extension movement patterns. They do not allow for the natural development of body control and balance which is needed for rolling, sitting, crawling and walking.

Baby walkers and jolly jumpers encourage babies to be on their feet before they are ready and interferes with normal muscle development, co-ordination, and skills. They have also been found to be highly dangerous and are a primary cause of household accidents to young children including burns and falls.

Lying your baby on their side

When your baby is awake you can introduce this position as part of your baby's play routine.

Always provide adult supervision when positioning your baby on their side. Return your baby to lying on their back if you leave the room.

- ◆ Place a support behind your baby's back ie: a pillow, rolled up towel or your leg, and place some toys in front of them.
- ◆ Make sure they lie on their left and right sides so they develop both sides equally.



Sleeping and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) guidelines

When you are discharged home we recommend that you keep your baby wrapped when they are asleep. When your baby is awake it is important to give them time unwrapped and encourage play in a variety of positions. In hot weather use a thin cotton sheet, piece of doubled muslin or cheesecloth, or a lightweight stretchy material wrap. In cool weather use a thicker cotton wrap. When it is time for your baby to go home, they **MUST** only be positioned on their back to sleep

The best way to position your baby for sleep safely is to:

1. Place **baby on their back** not on their tummy or side to sleep
2. Place baby with **head and face uncovered** to sleep
3. Keep baby in a **smoke free** environment
4. Provide a **safe sleeping environment** night and day, position baby with their feet at the bottom of the cot with blankets tucked in firmly
5. Place baby in their **own safe sleeping place** in the **same room as an adult caregiver** for the first six to twelve months
6. **Breastfeed** baby



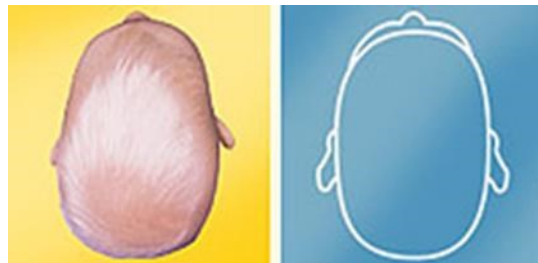
Plagiocephaly and protecting your baby's head shape

Newborn baby's skulls are soft and can change easily if they remain in the one position for long periods of time. Plagiocephaly is a term used to describe a flat area on the back of a baby's skull. A flattening occurs if the baby has a preference to turn their head to only one side. It does not affect brain development but it is a common condition occurring in newborns around 6-8 weeks and is **preventable**.

There are many things you can do to prevent your baby developing plagiocephaly. These techniques are also useful if you have noticed a flattened area developing on your baby's head.

What can you do to prevent a flat spot or plagiocephaly?

- ◆ When asleep, place your baby on their back and alternate their head position from looking left to looking right each sleep.
- ◆ Vary their position in the cot by sleeping them at either end of the cot to stop them always looking in one direction at their favourite spot.
- ◆ Play during the day should include positions such as tummy time and lying on their side so they are not laying on the back of their head.
- ◆ Ensure you talk to your baby, offer toys and bottle/dummy equally from alternating sides. Additionally, alternate holding positions when feeding baby (left arm to right arm).
- ◆ Vary your carry and cuddling positions.



Images provided courtesy of Cranial Technologies

Tummy Time

Tummy time is important for developing balance and head control. You should aim for your baby to practice some tummy time everyday with an adult supervising. There are a number of ways and positions to practice tummy time. It is important to make sure your baby is actively trying to lift their head up.

- ◆ Carry your baby over your shoulder to start strengthening their neck muscles which help to lift their head. Tip: Ensure your baby's arms rest on your shoulder.
- ◆ Position your baby on their tummy with a rolled up towel for support underneath their chest. Tip: Encourage your baby to look up.
- ◆ Modify your position to try other tummy time positions that work for you and your baby. Tip: Ensure your baby's elbows are below their shoulders so they are propping on their forearms as this makes it easier for them to lift their head.



Roll your baby onto their side to pick them up

When picking up or putting your baby down, first turn them to one side and pick them up sideways. This helps develop better head control, reduces arching and gives them a different movement experience which is important for their gross motor development.



Nursing/carrying babies

Whenever possible position your baby's head straight in the midline.

Try the positions shown in the photos below – over your forearm, over your shoulder with both arms tucked in or on their tummy across your lap with one knee higher than the other.



Nappy change developmental activities:

Once the nappy change is complete, spend some time interacting and bonding with your baby.

- ◆ Encourage your baby to keep their head in the middle by establishing eye contact with your baby. You might like to stroke your baby's head or brush their hair with a soft brush.
- ◆ Stroke across their chest firmly using diagonal strokes to encourage them to bring their hands to middle.
- ◆ Allow your baby to feel their own hands and encourage your baby to move their hands to their mouth.
- ◆ Bring their arms forward and across their body and hold firmly (upper body cuddle).
- ◆ Curl their legs up with their knees together and hold (lower body cuddle).



Head control exercises

These activities will help your baby to strengthen their neck muscles and start to develop their head control.

- ◆ Position your baby on your lap with their head in the middle and their legs up on your tummy. This is a good position to talk to your baby and let them focus on your face.
- ◆ Hold your baby on your chest, with legs curled up underneath them, to practice lifting and turning their head.
- ◆ Hold your baby in a sitting position with shoulder and neck support so they can practice holding their head up.

