



## Tummy Time and Handwriting

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The day you bring your little one home from the hospital, you are overwhelmed with emotions. They appear so fragile and delicate. This is the moment when your life and all the decisions you make have changed forever. You now have this amazing child to care for. From feedings, dirty diapers, dressing and soothing their discomforts, parents are automatically inclined to do all of the above. But what most parents fear, and tend to forget about, is giving their newborns "tummy time". Tummy time is significant for so many reasons. It helps children develop head control, spinal musculature, arm strength and sensory development, as well as reducing the chance of SIDS. All of these are so important for the achievement of the many developmental milestones that are to come in the next months.

What parents may not realize is, in order to have refined control of our hands, we must have good control of the larger muscle groups (our torso and shoulders). This is evident in typical development when a child is only able to swat without graded movements before they can successfully swat or grasp in supported sitting or on their backs. Once they are able to sit unsupported, their reaching and grasping tends to be close to the body. As their postural control improves, they are able to grasp and maneuver toys further from their bodies. Before you know it, they are able to pick up the tiniest object off the floor. This should not be misinterpreted. If a child has poor postural control and delayed fine motor abilities, this does not mean that you cannot address shoulder, arm and hand strength until the child has the postural control. But this is why it is so important to build up all of those muscles and to begin very early on in your baby's life.

Tummy time enables a child to build up shoulder and arm strength, which is the foundation for later crawling and fine motor manipulation, including handwriting. Yes that is right, tummy time is so important for the development of handwriting skills. A child with weak shoulders will have weak wrists and fingers, making handwriting challenging and fatiguing.

I am not recommending that you place your newborn on their tummy for 30 minutes and walk away. Always supervise when they are this young and weak. You will see as time progresses, they will be able to tolerate more with better control. Before you know it, they will begin to push



up on their forearms. To modify this activity, place them over a small boppy or over your leg to promote bearing weight through their arms. Some babies may detest being on their tummies. This does not mean you should stop. Grade it to what you and your infant can tolerate. Place toys in front of them to gain their attention and motivation. As they get stronger, they will start to grasp and manipulate toys in this position. Your baby will then be able to push up on all fours and play in this position. They may crawl. However, some babies bypass crawling all together and go straight to walking. Crawling is an overall strengthening exercise and helps build up arm strength. So for babies who don't crawl, emphasize playing on all fours, laying over your leg while bearing weight on one arm while reaching for a toy with the other, stuffing a tunnel with pillows and having them crawl over them, and wheel barrel walking.

Wheel barrel walking is exactly what it sounds like. Have your child bear weight on both arms and support them on their pelvis removing their lower body off the floor. You want them to walk on their arms. You may have to guide them by moving their arms for them the first few times. Once your child has the idea and you feel that they are breezing through it, you can lower your support to their thighs and then just above their ankles. The further away your hands are from their torso, the harder it is. For weaker children you may have to support them higher up on their torso. This is a fun activity that you can do with them as they get older. You can set up an activity, i.e. place a puzzle at one end of the room and place the pieces at the other end. Wheel barrel walk them to one end, have

them retrieve a piece and place it in their pocket or you can hold it while they wheel barrel walk to the puzzle and place it in. Be creative, you can do this with almost any activity and you can make it more challenging by having them wheel barrel over pillows or couch cushions.

All of these activities will assist your child in developing strong shoulder, arm, wrist and hand muscles to enable successful fine motor manipulation, including handwriting. So get your child ready for kindergarten by starting early.

## Great Activities to Promote Shoulder, Arm and Hand Strength

- Place them on their tummies on a ball and have them walk off using their arms while you hold their feet.
- Animal walking.
- Have them lie over a ball putting weight on one arm while doing an activity on the floor with the other.
- Roll out a big piece of paper on the floor and have them lie on their tummies to color or paint.
- You can make your child reach up for toys.
- Have them push toy cars while on their hands and knees.
- Color, paint, magnets, stickers, shaving cream, water and paintbrushes can be used on an easel. You can even draw a road on a piece of paper and have them move their toy cars on the easel. If you don't have an easel use your refrigerator.
- You can give them a paintbrush and water and have them paint your fence or house outside.
- Window markers.
- Tape a piece of paper under a child-size table and have them lie on their backs to draw in this position.

## Great Activities to Develop Wrist and Hand Control

Please keep in mind that children should be supervised at all times when manipulating small objects.

- Cause and effect toys.
- Shape sorters.
- Blocks.
- Books.
- Toys with resistance such as pop beads, legos, velcro, tinker toys, and magnets.
- Instead of handing your child toys, give them resistance and tell them to pull the toy.
- Crayons and craft activities, the smaller the better.
- Squeezable glues and paints.
- Tearing paper and crumpling paper into small pieces.
- Manipulating small objects like glueing confetti to paper or peeling small stickers.
- Playdoh activities with cookie cutters, rolling pins, scissors, and plastic knives. Roll the playdoh into balls, press it down with fingers, pull it apart, or hide objects in it to have child open it up to pull the object out.
- Rapper snappers.
- Coins into a slot.
- Pegs into a pegboard.
- Puzzles with small knobs.
- Any game that has small pieces and resistance.
- Finger puppets.
- Finger play (i.e. making eye glasses with fingers).
- Chalk on a chalkboard.
- Squeeze a bulb (i.e. nasal bulb) or bath toy to suck up water and squirt. You can use air to blow cotton balls or paper.
- String beads on lace or on a pipe cleaner.
- Wikki stix.
- Color with 3/4 inch crayons, Crayola has triangular crayons that promote finger placement.
- Play with rice, beans, sand, and water using spoons and cups.
- Hand races: See who can pick up the most objects the fastest while keeping the objects in their hand without dropping them.
- Pick up objects with ice tongs.
- Buttons, snaps, and latches.
- Sand art.
- Games with tweezers (i.e. Bed Bugs or Operation).
- Games with small pieces (i.e. Hi Ho Cherry O, Light Bright, screws/nuts/bolts, Ants in the Pants, Kerplunk, or pick up sticks).
- Travel size games (i.e. Connect Four, HI -Q, or a fishing game).
- Fill balloon with flour to squeeze.
- Scissor activities (i.e. cut playdoh, cardboard, and paper).
- Hand held vibrator to squeeze.
- Flashlights with squeeze buttons.
- Wind up toys.
- Squeeze clothes pins, you can have child pick up objects with them or incorporate them into any game for more fun.
- Have the child try to open the clothespins from the closed side. You can have them do repetitions and/or see how long they can hold it open. You can make this fun by having races to see who can hold the clothespin open the longest.

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