

# FLOOR PLAY

## BEYOND TUMMY TIME

Small moments. More ways to move.



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# More Ways to Play, More Ways to Learn

Tummy time is one part of the picture.

Your baby also needs opportunities to move on their back and explore side-lying during awake, supervised play. Each position offers a different way to look, reach, kick, and connect with you.

Follow your baby, not a stopwatch.

Begin with a brief, comfortable moment. Pause when your baby needs a break, and offer another opportunity later. A little variety throughout the day can make floor play feel more manageable.

## Down Before Up

*This guide focuses on early floor play before independent sitting. Choose activities that feel comfortable for your baby and fit their current abilities.*

# Start with a Simple Space

Choose a firm, flat surface on the floor.

Use a clean play mat with room to move. Clear away small objects, cords, and anything your baby could pull down. Keep pets and older children from crowding the play space.

Keep the setup easy.

One lightweight, age-appropriate toy and your face are plenty. Your baby does not need a collection of equipment to enjoy movement.

Stay close and watch their cues.

Play when your baby is awake and comfortable. Keep their nose and mouth clear. Pause for persistent crying, tiredness, or discomfort. If your baby becomes sleepy, move them to their safe sleep space.

# Play on Their Back

## Bring their hands toward the middle.

Around 3 months, babies generally begin bringing their hands together at midline - the center of their body. This becomes more coordinated around 3-4 months. For babies born early, use corrected age.

## Offer a gentle nest for play.

During awake, closely supervised play, I sometimes use a small baby blanket or lightweight towel rolled into a U shape around the body, tucked beneath the outer shoulders and bottom. Gentle support can help bring the arms forward toward midline. Keep the head flat, the face clear, and arms and legs free to move.

## Invite looking and reaching upward.

Use securely attached hanging toys on a stable floor play gym for visual interest. Place toys above the chest, within reach as skills develop, so your baby can reach upward and gradually extend their arms. Avoid loose cords or loops. Offer your face or a toy to either side to encourage looking both ways.

**The nest is a temporary play support, never a sleep setup. Remove it when play ends or your baby becomes sleepy.**

# Discover Side-Lying Play

Try a supported moment on each side.

Some babies find side-lying unfamiliar or unsettling and may seem afraid of tipping forward or backward. I like to place a small towel roll behind their back or keep my hand gently on their trunk to help them feel secure. Stay beside your awake baby, keeping their face clear and arms comfortably forward. The roll is for supervised play only, never sleep.

Make it interesting.

Place your face or a toy in front of them. This position can bring their hands closer together and give them another way to explore a toy.

Keep it brief and comfortable.

Offer both sides without insisting on equal time in one session. If your baby repeatedly resists one side, mention it to your pediatrician or pediatric physical therapist.

**Side-lying is for awake, supervised play. Always place your baby on their back for sleep.**

# Make Tummy Time Part of the Mix

Get down where they can see you.

Place your awake baby on their tummy on a firm floor mat. Bring your face close to their eye level. Keep their arms comfortably forward and their nose and mouth clear.

Start small and respond.

A brief attempt is a useful starting point. Offer breaks and change position before frustration builds. If the floor is difficult, awake chest-to-chest play with a fully awake caregiver may be a gentler starting place.

Let play grow with your baby.

As comfort improves, offer a toy in front and then slightly to either side. Give your baby space to look, reach, and explore without pushing them into a position they cannot manage.

*Back, side, tummy, then a cuddle: variety can be simple.*

# What I Want Parents to Notice

## Look at how movement feels.

Does your baby look toward both sides? Do both arms and legs take part in play? Can they settle in more than one position? Notice comfort and variety as well as new milestones. Does your baby seem unusually stiff or floppy? Is movement noticeably different on the two sides of their body?

## Ask for support when a pattern persists.

Talk with your pediatrician if you notice a consistent head tilt, difficulty turning one way, persistent stiffness, unusual floppiness, or asymmetrical movement, such as one arm or leg moving much less than the other. A pediatric physical therapist can help assess positioning and movement.

## Act promptly on a change.

Contact your pediatrician promptly if your baby loses a skill they previously used or you notice a new decrease in movement. You do not need to wait for a missed milestone to share a concern.

*Your observations matter. Early conversations can help you understand what your baby needs.*

# Let's Get Started!

## 1:1 VIRTUAL CONSULTATION SESSIONS

Wondering which positions feel best for your baby? In a virtual baby wellness consultation, we can look at their movement together and explore playful ways to support comfortable floor time at home.

## EXPLORE CONSULTATION OPTIONS

I offer virtual baby wellness consultations and in-home pediatric physical therapy in NYC and the Hamptons. Whether you have a specific concern or want ideas for everyday play, we can discuss which option best fits your family.

A little space to move.  
A familiar face nearby.  
Another chance to discover.

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Parent resources: American Academy of Pediatrics, [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org), "Back to Sleep, Tummy to Play" and "3 Tummy Time Activities to Try With Your Baby"; Dr. Tara Liddle, Why Motor Skills Matter; NIH Safe to Sleep, "Ways to Reduce Baby's Risk." General education; individual medical or developmental needs may require tailored guidance.