

## **FITNESS AND DEVELOPMENT: 0 TO 6 MONTHS**

Why discuss fitness at such an early time during development? Although it may seem that all your newborn ever does is sleep, eat, and poop, achieving early motor milestones during the first six months of life is the basis for continued good health.

### **GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT**

Newborn infants enter the world from a very cramped space. In order to achieve the motor skills necessary to gain independence, your baby has to develop strength and range of motion. Babies develop strength from head to toe: They first lift their heads and kick their legs before they begin to use their fingers for feeding. Spending time in a variety of positions helps babies gain these skills.

In 1992, the American Academy of Pediatrics launched the “Back to Sleep” campaign, based on the fact children who sleep on their backs are at far less of a risk for sudden death syndrome (SIDS). Because babies are spending more time on their backs, they can develop a flat spot on their heads, called “plagiocephaly”. This is only a cosmetic problem, but if left untreated, can result in tight neck muscles.

If you notice that your baby is turning his or her head in only one direction or that a flat spot is developing, talk with your pediatrician as soon as possible. A referral to a physical therapist may be made to teach you how to perform gentle stretching exercises with your baby. Sometimes, simple changes, such as rocking your baby with your other arm, can help with head preference.

While awake, the best position for your baby to develop strength is on his or her stomach. However, babies should not be left on their stomachs unsupervised. Bright colored mats, baby-proof mirrors and toys placed on the floor can entertain them when they are on their tummies. Tummy time does not have to be on the floor; it can also be in your arms or on your lap for more stimulation.

In addition, during the first six months, babies learn to roll over and begin to develop early sitting skills. Babies at this age are developing an excellent base of strength that allows them to progress to crawling and walking over the next six months. Support them through a variety of positions of play and provide plenty of face-to-face time. You are your child’s favorite toy at this age!