

SHOWCASE

© PAGE 39 | WWW.SUNTIMES.COM | WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2007 | EDITOR: AMANDA BARRETT | Let's get into it.



BABY THE FIRST YEARS

TUMMY TIME

Babies should sleep on backs, but 'downtime' helps, too

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Following doctor's orders, little Keenan Kraut, just 15 weeks old, sleeps on his back at night and naptime.

When he's awake, he frequently finds himself in a new, unfamiliar position — on his stomach.

Keenan's mom, Sara, a physical therapist from Chicago, said Keenan isn't always enthusiastic about this down-on-the-stomach downtime, dubbed "tummy time." But she knows that as he grows, it's the best position for him to be in.

"I try to keep him there as long as possible," Kraut said. "I do this when he is awake and alert, when he wants to play."

Keenan's movements are subtle, like sitting up with the help of Mom or lifting his head while laying on his stomach. But medical experts say even these small movements can make a big difference in his physical development.

In 1992, after research established a link between Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and babies sleeping on their stomachs or

sides, the American Academy of Pediatrics launched its "Back to Sleep" campaign. Babies, the campaign stated, always should sleep on their backs in a crib free of toys, pillows and quilts.

SIDS rates dropped more than 40 percent since the safe sleeping campaign began. But a possible unintended side effect was an increase in skull deformities in infants as well as underdeveloped muscles.

"We started getting a huge rash of young babies who were referred to us because of developmental delays" about six to eight years ago, said Guy Girolami, executive director of the Pathways Center in Glenview. "Parents were bringing this up: 'He isn't rolling; he keeps his head turned to one side; he doesn't like to be on his tummy; he's got a flat head!'"

Babies should continue to sleep on their backs. But parents are being advised to make a concerted effort to give their infant enough tummy time.

"I think parents really are a little bit fearful to do this," Girolami said. "They also don't have any



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Sara Kraut gives Keenan, her 15-week-old son, some "tummy time" at Pathways in Glenview. | JEAN LACHAT-SUN-TIMES

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strategies to do this."

Dolphine Coleman, a family nurse practitioner at La Rabida Children's Hospital in Chicago, said she doesn't think there's a lot of awareness about tummy time. Therapists at the hospital's Premier Kids Clinic, which serves children from birth to 5 years old, discuss tummy time with new parents, she said.

"We really like to see your newborn on the floor [on their stomach] 10 minutes a day, three times a week," Coleman said. "It helps with the development of neck, shoulder and upper trunk muscles. It prepares them for the next stage of development."

The not-for-profit Pathways Awareness Foundation also is encouraging parents to start putting their babies on their stomachs as early as possible to help develop strong early motor skills and prevent infant skull deformities.

Babies always should be



"I try to keep him there as long as possible," Sara Kraut says of Keenan's down-on-his-stomach time. | JEAN LACHAT-SUN-TIMES

supervised during tummy time. The foundation's Web site, www.pathwaysawareness.org, offers suggestions of tummy time techniques tested by parents and babies.

"When you don't have tummy time, you don't develop upper body strength," said Girolami, who added that a baby rolling itself is one who is integrating strength and movement of

his tummy, back and sides. "If you don't learn to roll and shift weight, then really movement is kind of stopped. You're up against a wall and you don't know where to go."