

Container Baby Syndrome – What is it and Why is it Significant?  
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All one has to do is a simple search on such retail sites as Amazon, Target, or Walmart to find hundreds of infant items/toys that “contain” your child in sitting, standing or back-lying positions. The descriptions of these items claim to promote such things as cognition, language, fine and gross motor skills, creativity, and stimulate sensory development. There is a lot of expectation in these claims! And what parent does not want all these things for their baby?

Container Baby Syndrome (CBS) is a term used to describe infants who spend excessive time in infant containers with resultant developmental issues. Infant containers include items such as swings, bouncy seats, rockers, jumpers, exersaucers, walkers/activity centers, and even car seats and strollers! The problem with using these devices arises when they are used excessively on a daily basis. When your child is “contained”, the time spent immobilized is increased, opportunities for important strengthening activities such as tummy time are decreased, and developmental issues can result. Such developmental issues may include:

- Delayed development in all areas: motor, sensory, cognition, communication, socio-emotional
- Poor muscle strength, coordination
- Increased weight, obesity
- ADHD
- Plagiocephaly, brachycephaly (flat spots on head, or misshapen head)

So where did this trend of increased container usage come from? A post from the [ChoosePT](#) website informs us that in 1992 the Back-to-Sleep program was initiated in response to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and since its inception, SIDS has decreased by 40%. However, by 2008, incidence of CBS increased to 1 in 7 children. With that said, you may be wondering how these two things are linked. As a result of the Back-to-Sleep program and the fear of having your baby on his/her tummy, many parents have extended the Back-to-Sleep approach throughout the day so many babies are getting less and less time on their tummies. Being on your tummy is hard work - you must activate extensor muscles of the neck and spine to lift your head and prop on your arms, which then works the upper extremity muscles....and if your baby is not used to being on their tummy they may cry. To make their child “happy” some parents will then choose to place the child in a fully supportive container, and once again, less tummy time results. Before you know it, you end up with increased time spent in containers and less time spent on the floor, exploring.

Add to this, the fact that it seems we all lead busy lives these days, juggling work, other children, time with a spouse or other family members, and finding time for ourselves, it is easy to see how the use of containers has found their way into our daily lives. After all, we need containers for travel (car seats, strollers), and sometimes, placing your infant in a container is a

safe place to put your child while you prepare dinner, or even take a hot shower after a long day.

If containers are a part of our lives and the lives of our babies, how do we make sure the negative effects do not outweigh the need for use? First, we need to be honest with how often containers are used. If you have a minute, think about your typical day, and write down the time spent in ALL containers (including car seats!). I think you will be surprised at how much time your child spends being contained. Once you have done that, try to figure out times during the day when you can limit container usage and give your child supervised playtime on the floor to move and explore. Most importantly, incorporate more tummy time into your child's day! This is important for building head and neck control, postural control and being able to extend their body against gravity. Current recommendations are to strive for 1 hour of cumulative total tummy time per day – this can include activities such as tummy time on the floor, holding your baby chest-to-chest, and use of “football” carry when carrying your baby. Since tummy time is a challenging activity for most babies, you should start every play session on their tummy then progress to easier positions such as lying on their back.

An important thing to remember, is that we all learn through movement, and being contained limits active exploration! A baby who actively explores their environment, such as learning to roll from back to tummy to get closer to a toy, then prop up on their elbows to better see that toy, then eventually reach their arm out to grasp that toy and vocalize to express happiness at obtaining that toy, will have developed skills related to cognition, language, fine and gross motor skills, creativity, and sensory development! All of this, by simply having active exploration/playtime on the floor.

For more playtime and tummy time ideas, along with information on developmental milestones, click [HERE](#) to go to the Pathways.org website.