



THE MAMA'S PHYSIO

Back Care for New Mothers

Almost every activity associated with taking care of your baby, from diaper changing to car seats, is done in a forward leaning position. As a result of this, coupled with some overstretched abdominal and pelvic muscles from pregnancy and delivery, your lower back may be feeling painful and tired.

Knowing the best way to carry, lift and feed your baby can help keep your back in its best shape.

Lifting your baby: Before picking up your baby, gently pull in and lift up your lower tummy muscles, (as if you were zipping up a pair of jeans). Keeping your back straight and moving from your hips as you lean over, pick up your baby and hold her/ him close to your chest. Exhale as you lift your baby up.

Feeding your baby: Whether you are breast or bottle feeding your baby, taking a moment to arrange your posture can make feeding your baby a precious time for bonding rather than a painful experience.

Bring your baby to your breast/ the bottle by having a pillow or two on your lap to avoid hunching forward. Don't forget a small pillow for behind your lower back too.

Alternate between feeding positions to avoid stressing the same muscles. When you are finished, try to stand up and gently stretch your neck and shoulders – looking to either side as far as is comfortable, rolling your shoulders up, back and down, inhaling as you lift your arms overhead, exhaling and lowering them down.

Managing your baby's equipment: Babies don't travel lightly! Carrying a heavy bulky changing bag around on the same shoulder can stress the muscles and joints in your arm, neck and back. If you can, try and use a messenger-style bag or a backpack to distribute weight more evenly across your body. If you have to use a single-shoulder style, be sure to switch sides regularly and look for bags with padded straps.



THE MAMA'S PHYSIO

Taking Care of Yourself

As a new mother, there are so many changes in your body and life. It is easy to become overwhelmed. It is important to remember that the best gift you can give your baby is a happy and healthy mother.

Naps: Naps are not just for your baby! Pregnancy, labor, delivery and taking care of a newborn are all hard work. Ideally when baby sleeps, mom should sleep too! Sleep is when your body does its recovery, and a well-rested mother is better able to cope with the physical and mental stresses she faces on a daily basis. When your baby is (finally) asleep, try and lie down too – this is not the time to catch up on housework!

Feeding yourself well: This is equally important whether you are breast or bottle feeding. Try and have several healthy snacks (fruit, yogurt, nuts, veggies) within easy reach. Don't forget to stash some in the diaper bag! Remember to drink plenty of water. Dehydration can often appear as tiredness. If you have offers of help, ask for dinner dishes you can keep in the freezer and re-heat as needed.

Being kind to your body: Your body has been through some huge changes in the past nine months. Now is not the time for vigorous stressful exercise but you can focus on gentle restorative exercise – getting outside for a short walk, either alone or with your baby, or trying a pilates or other gentle exercise specifically for new mothers. It is important to get medical clearance before beginning any new exercise program, especially if you have had a C-section. Your therapist may be able to guide you towards appropriate exercise programs available on DVD or from your local library that you can do at home. Start slowly, in ten minute increments at first, and gradually do more as you feel able.