



Before *&* After

A physiotherapy guide to staying comfortable and healthy before and after childbirth



Before & After

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION



This booklet provides guidelines to help you to stay comfortable and healthy, before and after childbirth.

Learn more about:

- ◆ the physical changes in your body.
- ◆ positions of comfort to use in pregnancy and labour.
- ◆ strengthening exercises to maintain and regain your muscle strength and improve posture.
- ◆ general guidelines for exercise before and after.
- ◆ how to prevent back pain by taking care of your back in daily life.
- ◆ relaxation as a skill for life.
- ◆ baby handling skills - to assist your baby's development.



PREGNANCY CAUSES YOUR BODY TO CHANGE

Think positive — get to know your body, practice relaxation

Your body changes to allow for your baby to grow

Maintain fitness with regular, gentle exercise

Vary your posture and positions regularly throughout the day

Listen to your body and avoid strain

Use your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to support your movement

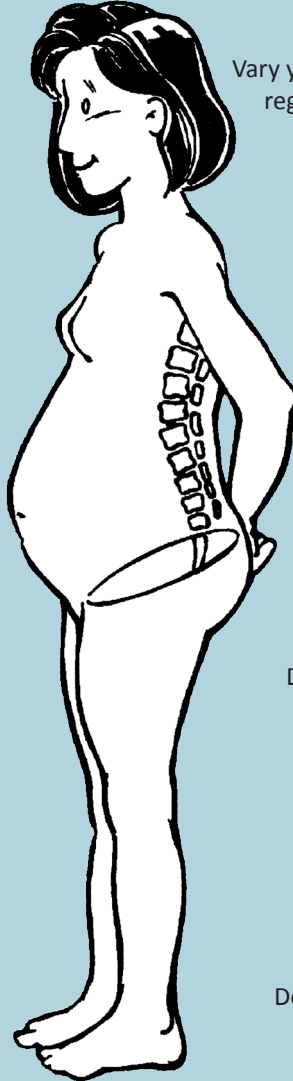
Specific treatment may help pain, numbness or pins and needles

Move smoothly to protect your pelvic joints

Do specific exercise for the pelvic floor muscles now and after baby is born

Wear comfortable supportive shoes to protect the arches of the feet

Walking helps the leg muscles to promote circulation
Don't stand still for too long



There are many things you can do to help manage these changes.

COMFORT POSITIONS

During your pregnancy:

Try different resting positions using furniture, pillows and other supports to relieve joint aches and to support the weight of your baby.

During labour:

Try different positions for comfort and to conserve energy



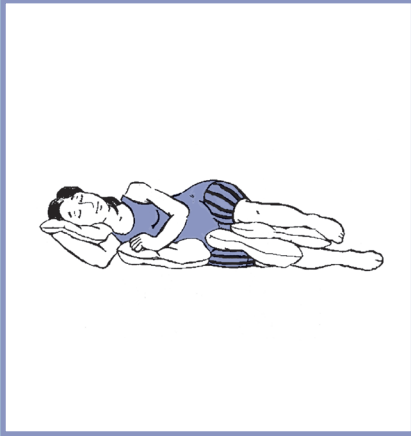
Forward Leaning Positions

- Ease back ache
- Provide support
- Assist relaxation



COMFORT POSITIONS

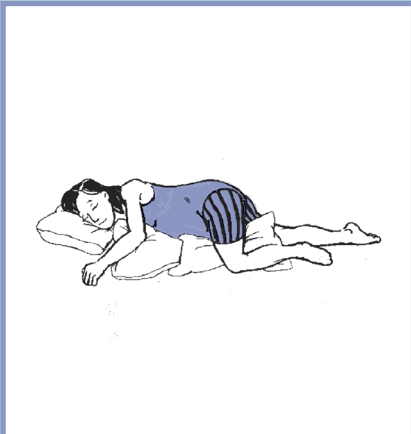
During your pregnancy:



During labour:



Side lying — a comfortable and supportive position for pregnancy and labour
— use pillows, beanbags for comfort under top leg and tummy



COMFORT POSITIONS

During your pregnancy:



During labour:



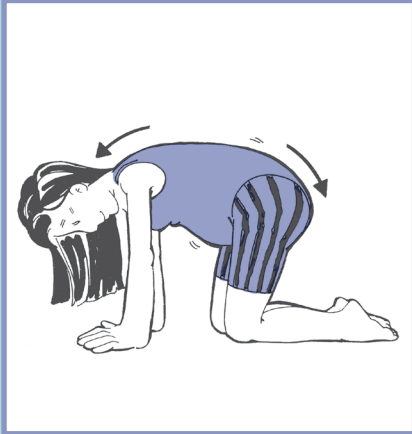
Supported Positions help take the strain off your back and legs

- ledge under kitchen bench
- small stool or several thick books
- support people



SPECIFIC EXERCISES — BEFORE AND AFTER

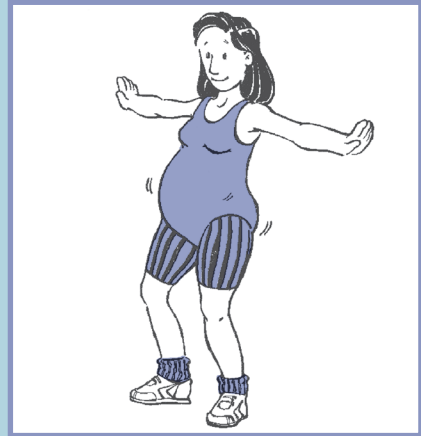
These exercises are only a guide, your physiotherapist can give you an individual program.



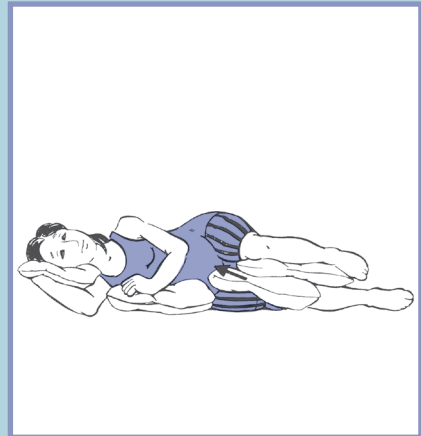
Cat Curls Kneel squarely on your hands and knees. Arch your back smoothly, tucking your bottom under and letting your head relax between your arms.



Ski squats Slowly slide halfway down wall, pause and gently draw in the pelvic floor, then slowly slide up.



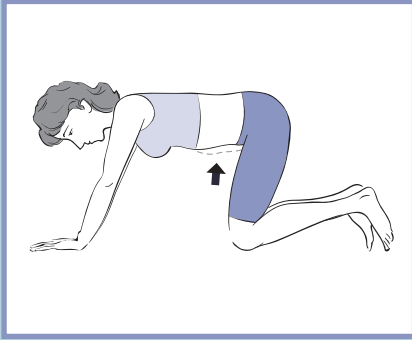
Belly dancing Slowly move your pelvis around in a circular motion — try in standing, lying and on all 4's.



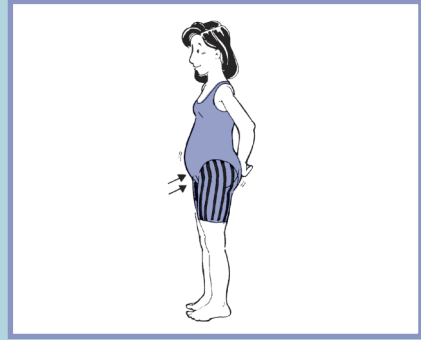
Transverse Abdominal Muscle Lying comfortably on your side, with pillows supporting you, breathe normally as you gently draw in the pelvic floor* and the deep transverse abdominal muscle which form a corset in the lower part of the abdomen.

SPECIFIC EXERCISES — BEFORE AND AFTER

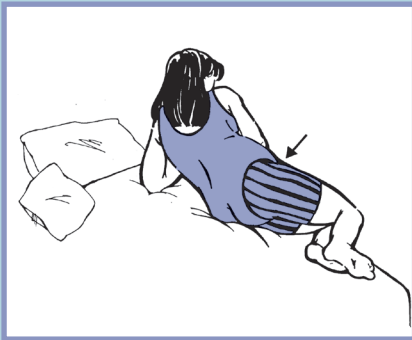
- ◆ **Avoid lying on your back** to exercise while you are pregnant - **exercise in other positions**
- ◆ Always **breathe easily** as you exercise - **never hold your breath**
- ◆ If you notice a central abdominal “ridge” appearing while moving or exercising, modify the activity and contact a physiotherapist to assist you with your program.



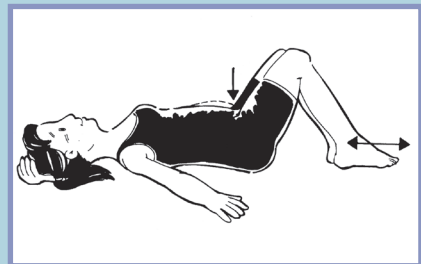
Transverse Abdominal Muscle
Kneeling squarely with knees under hips, hands under shoulders, your back in mid position. Gently draw in the pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles. Keep breathing easily.



Posture
Standing tall, shoulders relaxed. Gently draw up the pelvic floor and the lower part of your tummy. Feel the protective “corset” surround and support your spine and pelvis.



Functional Exercise
Gently draw up the pelvic floor and lower tummy while you change position to support your movements.



Transverse Abdominal Muscle - this position for AFTER ONLY
Lying on your back with both knees bent up, breathe normally. Draw up the pelvic floor* muscle and gently draw in the lower part of your tummy. Keep your back and pelvis quite still. Hold this tension as you straighten and then bend up one leg.

BEFORE AND AFTER PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

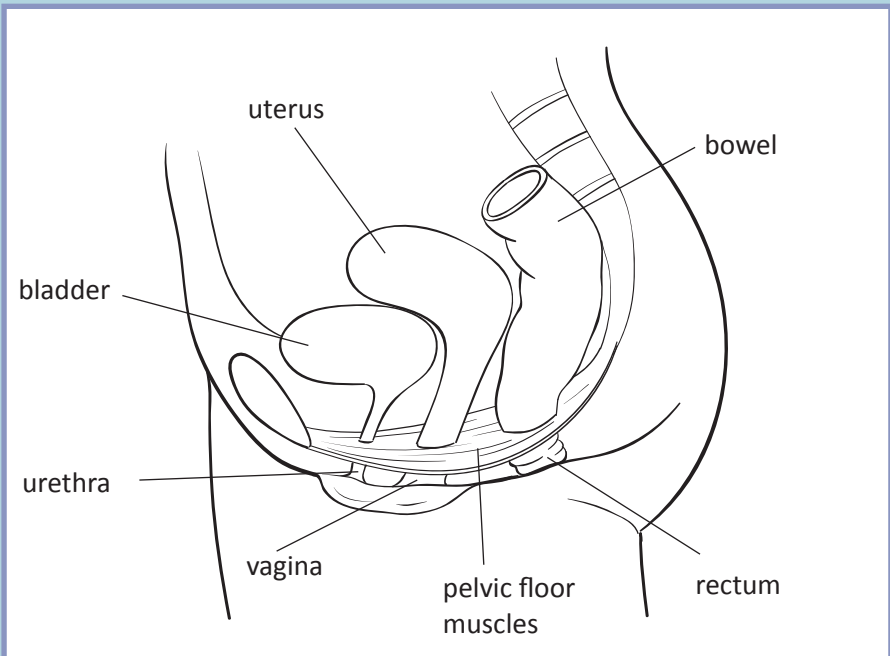
Why do pelvic floor exercises?

The pelvic floor muscles form a “sling” across the floor of the pelvis. They support the bladder, uterus and rectum within our bodies. These muscles are stretched and weakened by pregnancy and delivery. Strong pelvic floor muscles will:

- ◆ close under strain of coughing, sneezing and exercising, to prevent loss of urine.
- ◆ help prevent prolapse of the pelvic organs.
- ◆ aid sexual function.

To strengthen the pelvic floor:

- ◆ You can perform these exercises while lying on your side, sitting, kneeling or standing.
- ◆ Slowly draw in and lift the muscles around your vagina and urethra as if trying to hold in gas or urine.
- ◆ Hold the muscles in while you continue to breathe, aim to hold for 2-3 breaths, do 10 exercises in a row. Do this 3 times a day.



BEFORE AND AFTER PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Straight after having your baby:

- ◆ Start gentle pelvic floor exercises within 24 hours - even if you have stitches or swelling
- ◆ movement of the muscle assists healing
- ◆ repeat short sessions frequently
- ◆ have regular rests lying flat
- ◆ support your perineum before you cough or sneeze (i.e. draw up your pelvic floor muscles, or support with your hand).
- ◆ gradually return to your normal strengthening program.

Success doesn't happen overnight. Work on this program daily for three months.

Maintain pelvic floor strength throughout your life. Even if you have no problems, this strengthening program can aid good control in later life.

Remember to contract and engage these muscles before you cough, sneeze or lift a heavy weight (including toddlers!).

It is also important to lose excess weight, avoid constipation or straining, and ensure that you change position and move regularly.

GOOD BLADDER AND BOWEL HABITS

1. Drink 1½-2 litres of fluid each day (especially if breast feeding).
2. Avoid constipation and straining to empty your bowels. Add extra fibre, fruit and vegetables to your diet.
3. Avoid "just in case" visits to the toilet.
4. Do your pelvic floor exercises each day.
5. To control urgency, use a pelvic floor hold.
6. Position for defaecation:

* **Lean forward** from the hips so your elbows rest on your knees. Keep your **back straight**, do not slump.

*If necessary, use a **footstool** so that your knees are higher than your hips.

*Gently relax your core and bulge your lower abdomen **forwards**. **Keep breathing**.



GENERAL EXERCISE

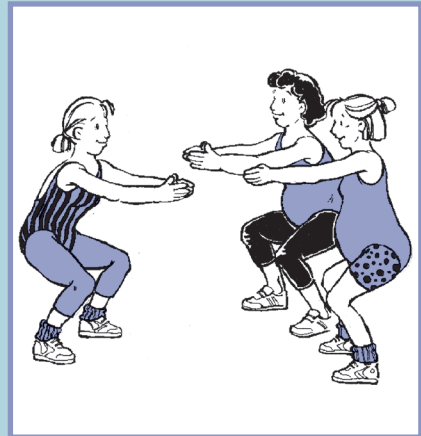
WHY EXERCISE BEFORE YOU HAVE YOUR BABY?

Exercise can help you to feel physically and mentally prepared for pregnancy, labour and the period after birth.

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE EXERCISE IN PREGNANCY

- ◆ Regular exercise is recommended. Aim to accumulate 150 minutes per week.
- ◆ Exercise for short periods at a moderate level, you should be able to talk as you exercise even though you are breathing faster.
- ◆ Avoid exercising in hot or humid conditions - Take care not to overheat.
- ◆ Warm up and cool down with gentle movement and stretches.

- ◆ Change position smoothly.
- ◆ Avoid lying flat on your back.
- ◆ Drink plenty of water before during and after exercise.



PRECAUTIONS

- ◆ Pregnancy is not the time to embark on a new sport or vigorous exercise program.
- ◆ Avoid contact sports after 4 months of pregnancy.
- ◆ Continue non contact sports as long as you are comfortable.
- ◆ Exercise safely – try a pregnancy specific class.
- ◆ Walking programs and exercise in water are also ideal options.

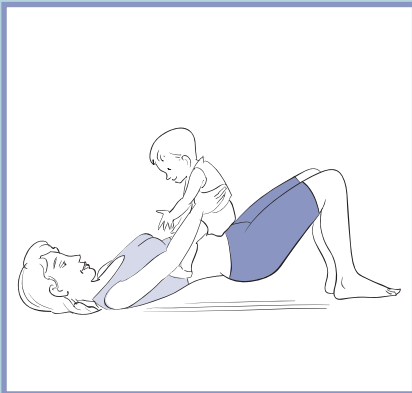
GENERAL EXERCISE

- ◆ Never exercise through pain while you are pregnant - stop and seek professional advice.
- ◆ Seek guidance from your health care provider if you experience incontinence with exercise.

WHY EXERCISE AFTER?

A specific exercise program will help you return to normal strength and function quickly.

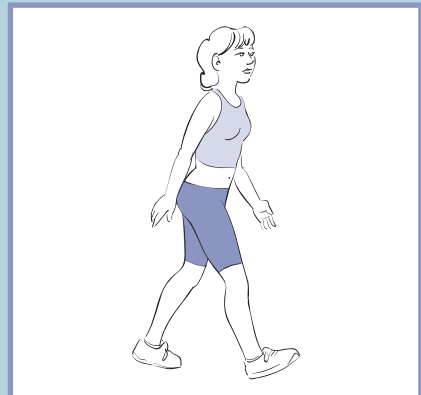
A gradual return to exercise will allow time for your body to recover from pregnancy and birth. Every person recovers differently.



Physiotherapists run exercise classes for pregnant and postnatal women – Contact the Australian Physiotherapy Association for information.
www.australian.physio

GUIDELINES FOR AFTER

- ◆ Ensure you do pelvic floor exercises.
- ◆ Your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles should be assessed by a physiotherapist and your exercises individualized to suit you.
- ◆ Commence walking when you feel ready.
- ◆ Wait several weeks before going swimming. (Check with your doctor if you are unsure when to start swimming).
- ◆ Avoid running and jumping for the first 3 months. (Longer if you have any back pain or bladder control problems).
- ◆ Aim to return to 30 minutes on most days of moderate intensity, low impact exercise within 3 months of delivery.
- ◆ A physiotherapist can help guide your return to exercise.



BACK CARE DURING PREGNANCY

WHY?

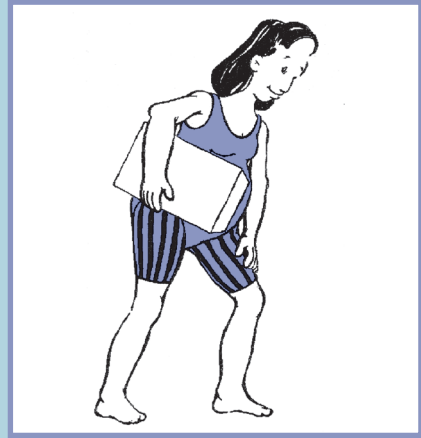
There is no simple way to cure back pain, but there are many things you can do to relieve your back ache and prevent back strain in your daily activities.



Position as close to object as you can.

Changes during pregnancy that affect your back are:

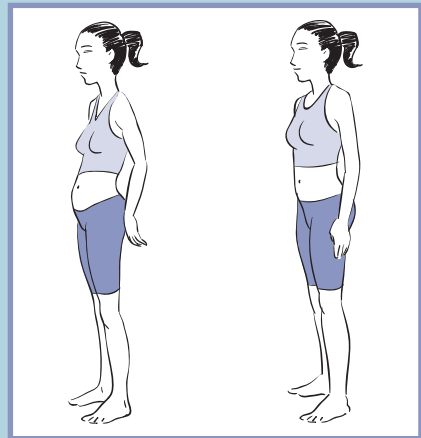
- ◆ Softening effect of hormones.
- ◆ Extra weight and changing shape of your body.
- ◆ Weak abdominal muscles.



Keep back straight as your legs do the work. Spread the load by pushing through one leg.

HOW?

- ◆ Vary your position during the day.
- ◆ Strengthen your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles to aid support.
- ◆ Exercise regularly.
- ◆ Practice good bending/lifting techniques.
- ◆ See a physiotherapist who treats pregnant women.



BACK CARE DURING PREGNANCY



If standing for long periods, use a step or ledge under one foot.



Lean on knee and hand if reaching across.



Try “log rolling” out of bed.



“Load” your knee to get up from floor

CARING FOR YOUR BACK WHILST YOU CARE FOR YOUR BABY

Raise the working height to you, where possible. If not, lower yourself by kneeling or sitting. When bending or lifting:

- ◆ Engage abdominals
- ◆ Engage pelvic floor
- ◆ Use your legs

POSITIONS TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR BACK

REMEMBER:

Hormonal changes can still affect you up to twelve months after you have had your baby.



Pick up toddlers using good lifting techniques.



Use knee on car seat when fitting car capsule.

CARING FOR YOUR BACK WHILST YOU CARE FOR YOUR BABY



The optimal height for change table is 4cm below bent elbow.



Use knee on bed to prevent back strain.



Half kneeling at corner of bed relieves strain.



If changing baby on floor, try half kneeling position.

CARING FOR YOUR BACK



Never carry a full baby bath, use a jug or bucket, to fill and empty.

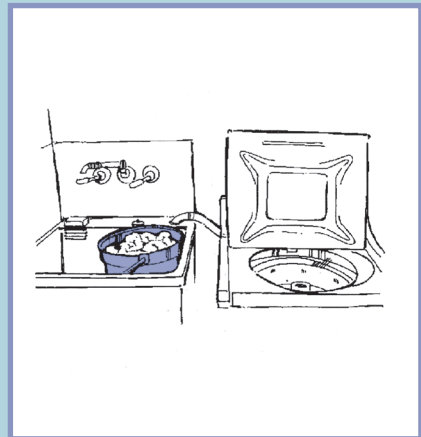


Kitchen bench is an ideal height.

BRING THE WORKING HEIGHT UP TO YOU



Always bring the job up to your height.



Nappy bucket in tub avoids awkward, heavy lifts.

CARING FOR YOUR BACK



Feeding baby in a chair gives better comfort and support than sitting in bed.



Use pillows for support when feeding.



When baby has some sitting balance, use nonslip mat and kneel beside bath.



Lift baby out of highchair using good lifting techniques.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AWARE OF YOUR BREATHING AND KNOWING HOW TO RELAX

BENEFITS FOR LABOUR

- ◆ Allows a central focus and promotes an even rhythm of breathing.
- ◆ Reduces panic.
- ◆ Promotes release of your body's endorphins (natural "pain relief").
- ◆ Conserves your body's energy.

HOW?



KEY WORDS

SIGH OUT..
HANDS OPEN..
PELVIC FLOOR OPEN

LET GO..
SOFT JAW..
LOW AND SLOW..



As your labour begins:

1. Breathe at your own pace.
2. Listen to your body.
3. Adjust your rate according to your body's demands.
4. Lean forward to make breathing easier.
5. Massage to help focus & calm the rhythm of your breath.
6. Focus on the OUT breath & let it take tension with it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AWARE OF YOUR BREATHING AND KNOWING HOW TO RELAX



BENEFITS FOR MOTHERHOOD

- ◆ Calms during times of stress and lack of sleep.
- ◆ Helps calm your baby at feed times.
- ◆ Assists with milk release.
- ◆ Promotes positive touch and massage.
- ◆ Helps you cope.

KEY WORDS

LONG FINGERS...
LOW SHOULDERS...
SOFT ARMS...

SOFT SIGH...
LET DOWN...
LET GO...

HOW?

As you feed and handle your baby:

1. Recognise tension, then release it.
2. Use supports so that you & your baby are comfortable.
3. Stroke your baby to soothe & reassure him or her, or simply for enjoyment.
4. Avoid quick movements.
5. Plan uninterrupted time for baby massage.
6. Play soothing music.

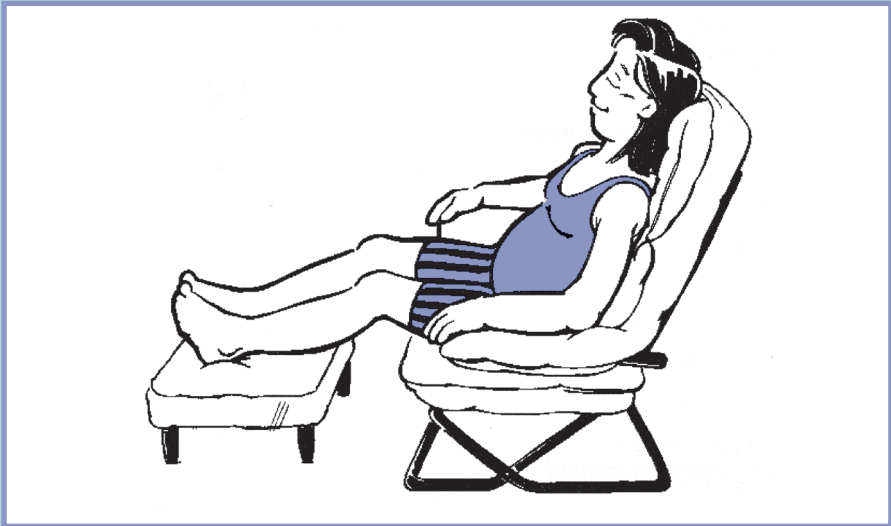


RELAXATION

Physical relaxation can:

- ◆ release tight muscles
- ◆ slow breathing and heart rate
- ◆ allow mental calming

Practising these techniques regularly can greatly improve energy levels, and help you cope with the demands of life.



Try to practise with your favourite soothing music.

RELAXATION ROUTINE

1. **Focus on the easy, gentle, rhythm of your normal breathing pattern.**
 - ◆ Allow your body to become loose and heavy.
 - ◆ With each breath out, let go a little bit more...
2. **Pull your feet up towards you.**
 - ◆ Stop pulling.
 - ◆ Let them hang heavily.
3. **Move your knees slightly apart.**
 - ◆ Stop moving.
 - ◆ Let them rest comfortably.
4. **Tighten your buttocks and pelvic floor.**
 - ◆ Release the tension.
 - ◆ Feel the softness.
5. **Tighten your tummy.**
 - ◆ Stop tightening.
 - ◆ Feel the looseness around your baby.
6. **Feel the easy rhythm of your breathing.**
 - ◆ With each breath out, let go a little bit more.
7. **Make your fingers and thumb go long.**
 - ◆ Stop stretching.
 - ◆ Feel the “slackness” in your hands.
8. **Pull your shoulders down towards your waist.**
 - ◆ Stop pulling.
 - ◆ Now think about the looseness around your shoulders.
9. **Press your head into the pillow.**
 - ◆ Stop pushing.
 - ◆ Let it sink into the pillow.
10. **Raise your eyebrows.**
 - ◆ Stop lifting them.
 - ◆ Be aware of the tension fading out of your forehead.
11. **Now gently lower your eyelids if your eyes are not already closed.**
 - ◆ Underneath, your eyes should feel heavy and be still.
12. **Pull your chin down.**
 - ◆ Stop pulling
 - ◆ Your lips should be loose, your teeth slightly apart and your tongue resting loosely in your mouth.
13. **Focus again on your slow, easy breathing.**
14. **Now allow yourself time to enjoy this wonderful state of relaxation.**

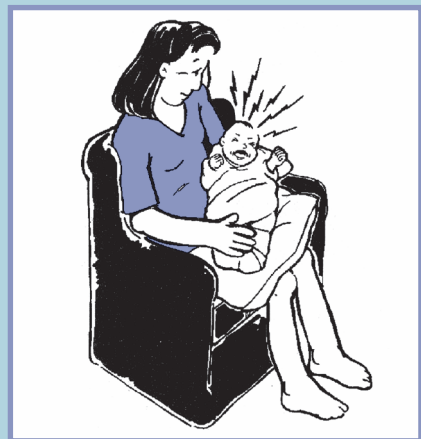
HINTS FOR RELAXATION

- ◆ Regular practice makes relaxation easier and helps you gain long term benefits.
- ◆ Start comfortably and well supported, then progress to any position.
- ◆ Use relaxation whenever feeling stressed.
 - breathe in, sigh out and “let go”.
 - check and release tension areas.
- ◆ A mental focus can help to enhance the state of relaxation.
 - imagine a “passive scene from nature”.
 - listen to soothing music.



Use these techniques at every opportunity:

- ◆ while sitting to feed the baby.
- ◆ resting during the day.
- ◆ in the car (especially if you're running late).
- ◆ to help going to sleep.
- ◆ during labour.
- ◆ at dentist or doctor visits.
- ◆ when baby is upset.



BABY MASSAGE

Time used for massage can be relaxing and enjoyable for mother and baby.

- ◆ use massage at a quiet, settled time.
- ◆ undress baby as much as possible.
- ◆ use a pure edible oil.
- ◆ put oil onto your hands, not directly onto baby.
- ◆ use firm, smooth, continuous strokes with as much hand contact as possible e.g. using palm of hand or flats of fingers.
- ◆ if stroking on chest, use diagonals (e.g. shoulder to opposite hip).
- ◆ if stroking on back, use long strokes down the back.
- ◆ stroking can also be used on the face, head and limbs.



Massaging baby on your lap.



At nappy change or after bath time is ideal.



Don't forget baby's back!

HANDLING YOUR BABY

Here are some simple ideas to help your baby's development.



Pick baby up by rolling to the side — this helps develop head control.



From an early age, place baby on tummy for awake and play time.



A good position for massage, play and talking.



Try a sling or pouch — good for dads too!

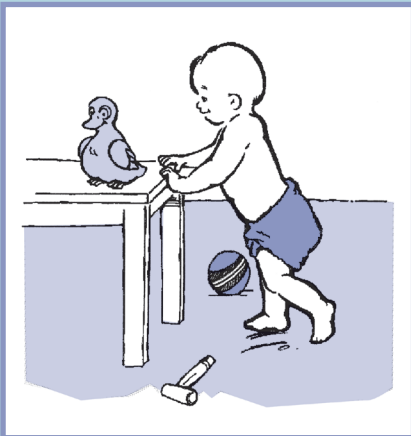
HANDLING YOUR BABY



Try different carrying positions.



Or this one for calming baby.



Allow baby to explore and learn through movement.

- Put your baby on his/her back to sleep to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Ensure baby's head is not always turning to the same side.
- Keep your baby in a smoke free environment (before and after birth).

CONCLUSION

We hope this booklet is of help to you.

If you have any problems or would like to know more about any of these topics please contact a physiotherapist through your:

- ◆ Local hospital
- ◆ Antenatal clinic
- ◆ Local G.P.
- ◆ Child Health Nurse

For further information:

Australian Physiotherapy Association: <https://australian.physio/>
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/>
<https://matermothers.org.au/>

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