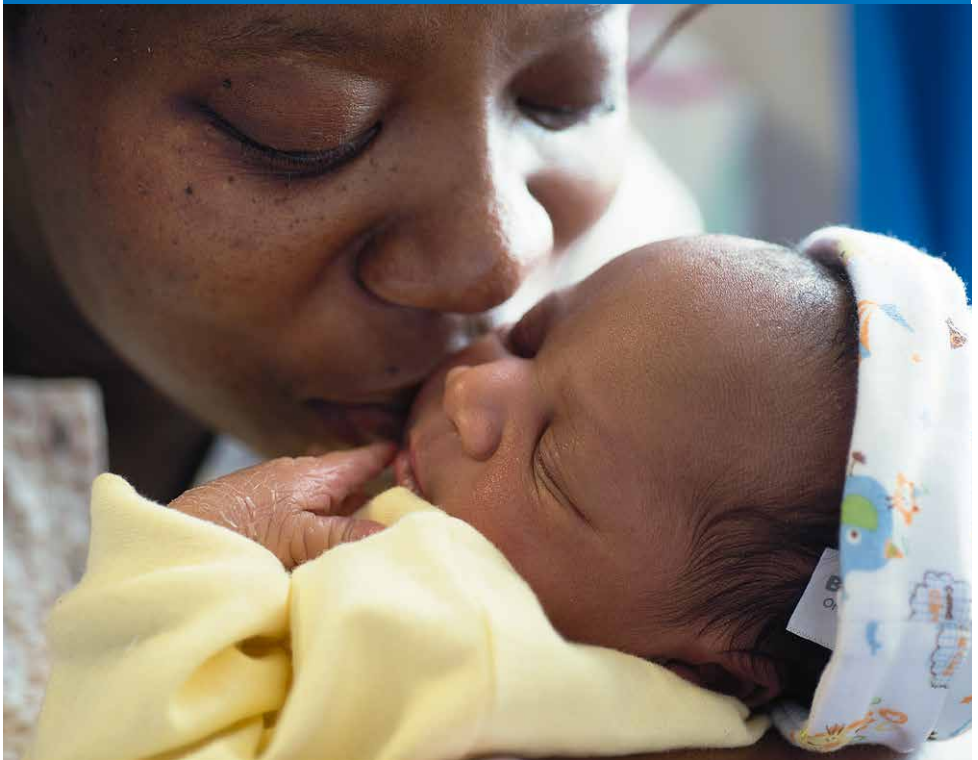


How to position, hold and interact with your baby



Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust
London Neonatal Operational Delivery Network, South London



This advice from the therapy team is for babies who have had a difficult time during pregnancy or after birth who may be having difficulties with their movement and development. They will, therefore, need to be positioned, moved and carried more carefully.

Due to the difficulties already experienced, your baby's body and limbs may be floppy or stiff. To help manage this, to support early development and to reduce the risk of flattening or changes to your baby's head shape, it is important for your baby to spend time in a variety of positions.

Some babies seem to have one preferred position but it is important for your baby to experience a variety of positions. It may take some time for your baby to feel comfortable and calm in these new positions. You can help by turning your baby slowly into each position and giving time to adjust.

If upset, help your baby to settle by using the advice given in the "How to calm your baby" leaflet, such as placing a cupped hand on the head and feet and gently talking, or helping your baby to hold their hands near to their face. If your baby continues to be upset, change their position and try again at another time.

At times, additional support may be required from the therapy services and referrals can be made to your local community therapy teams if appropriate.

Holding your baby

If your baby tends to arch their back and stiffen their arms and legs, it can be helpful to hold them in a more curled up and supported position such as:

- Tucked carrying
- Flexed over your forearm.

When being lifted out of the cot, your baby may be more comfortable if you turn them onto their side first and then lift, supporting as much of your baby's body as possible. Help your baby bring their hands together and arms forward and towards the middle of their body. Avoid your baby's arms dangling to the sides or behind their body.

Lying your baby on their tummy

When awake, you can help your baby have playtime on their tummy. Spending time lying on their tummy helps babies to get used to this position. Lying on mummy or daddy is comforting because your baby will be able to hear, see, smell and feel you. You can start tummy time with your baby lying on your chest with you slightly reclined. You can gradually alter your position to make this more challenging.

If your baby starts to lift their head off your chest in this position, then you can try placing them on their tummy on your lap or on a play mat with a rolled up towel or blanket under their chest. Your baby may get tired quickly so start by doing this for very short periods of time and increase slowly.

Try not to pick your baby up every time they cry. Instead, you can help your baby to relax and lift them up for a cuddle when they begin to settle down.

Place toys your baby likes in front of them and encourage your baby to look and touch them. Encourage your baby to lift their head by stroking their neck and back to stimulate the muscles, and also by giving firm support over their pelvis and/or around their shoulders

Please note: Do not leave your baby lying on their tummy unattended or when your baby is sleeping.

If your baby arches their back a lot in this position please discuss this with the therapy team as your baby may not be ready for this yet.



Lying your baby on their back

It is good for babies to spend some time lying on their back. In this position you can help your baby to work on keeping their head in the middle by interacting with them from above. You can also look at your baby, use toys and talk to them to encourage your baby to turn their head to the left and right.

To make your baby feel more secure and to help with movements in this position you can:

- Use rolled towels or blankets on either side
- Use a rolled towel or blanket to make a nest around their body and under their legs.

In this position you can help your baby to bring their hands to the middle to explore them, and bring them to their face or towards a toy.

Lying your baby on your lap

This position helps support your baby's body and encourages them to bring their arms in closer to their body, helping them learn where their middle is.

Put your baby's feet flat against your body with their knees bent.

Your baby may like this position because you can sing and talk to them and you can have fun interacting with each other.



Lying your baby on their side

Place your baby lying on their left or right side to encourage them to bring their hands to the middle and towards their face. Remember that helping your baby keep their hands together towards the middle of their body is really important.

Place toys near them to encourage your baby to look forwards and down. It is easier for your baby to bring their hands together and explore toys in this position.

Use a rolled towel or blanket behind your baby's back, head and hips to help maintain this position.

If needed, a roll can also be placed in front of your baby to support them to stay in this position, and to support their top leg and arm.

Please note: Do not leave your baby in this position unattended and/or asleep.



Helping your baby to sit up

It is good for babies to spend some time sitting up so that they can work on holding their head up and look around. This can be in a baby bouncer or a tumble form chair depending on what your therapist has advised.

When sitting in their chair you can help to ensure your baby's body and head are in a straight line by using rolled blanket or towels either side of their body and/ or under their legs. Help your baby to bring their hands together and towards the middle of their body.

Please note: Don't leave your baby in the bouncer chair for longer than 30 mins at a time as they may get tired.

Your baby must be awake and closely supervised at all times when sitting in a bouncer chair.

Helping your baby interact with their environment

Babies that are less than 40 weeks gestational age should not be exposed to too much sensory stimulation. We try to create an environment for the baby which is like being inside their mummy's tummy. Direct light should be avoided and the environment should have very low light before 32 weeks of gestational age.

Sleep is really important to your baby, so too much noise must be avoided. The sounds that your baby heard when in mummy's tummy were low and quiet. You can read stories and sing songs to your baby in a quiet and whispering voice.

The use of phone and tablet screens are not usually recommended for babies in the intensive care unit. This is because the pictures and sounds contain too much information, which is overstimulating for your baby's developing brain.

When your baby is old enough it will be important to play with your baby to help them to learn. Your therapist will show you the best way to do this.

Safer sleep advice

Do not leave rolls or toys in the cot when your baby is sleeping.

The Lullaby Trust provides advice on safer sleep. Visit

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice>.

Notes

Other patient information leaflets are available for:

- How to calm your baby
- How to help your baby get ready for breast or bottle feeding

Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

If you would like this information in another language or another format such as braille, large print or an electronic or audio file, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 8333 3355** for University Hospital Lewisham or **020 8836 4592** for Queen Elizabeth Hospital or email **LG.pals@nhs.net**

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