



Injury Prevention for New Moms

If you are a new mother, congratulations! Along with the blessings, however, come some physical challenges. Various movements associated with care of a baby can cause serious distress to your body if you don't perform them functionally. How can you lessen the risk of injury? Learn proper movement patterns for typical activities you do with your baby. (Exercise can also help; seek the assistance of a personal trainer or group fitness instructor if you have questions.)

Read the suggestions below from Lisa Druxman, MA, founder of Stroller Strides® LLC and author of *Lean Mommy* (Center Street 2007), and Carl Petersen, PT, a physical therapist and co-author of *Fit to Deliver* (Hartley & Marks 2005).

Carrying the Baby

As a new mom, you may spend many hours holding the baby in a slumped position with your spine "collapsed," or with one hip jutting out to the side. (Most often you will hold your baby on one side.) Chances are that your wrist will be flexed to get a good grip on the baby, and your scapula will be in a stretched, protracted position. Instead, try to

- keep the spine in neutral alignment, with shoulders pulled back;

- bring the baby to the body's center whenever possible; and
- maintain a neutral wrist position, especially if experiencing carpal tunnel issues.

Feeding the Baby

During breastfeeding you will often hunch over to bring your breast to the baby, which can wreak havoc on the spine. Other concerns when feeding are holding the breast for the baby (compromising the wrist) and crossing the legs (causing pelvic and spinal imbalance). Ideally, you should

- sit in neutral-spine position in an ergonomically correct chair and use a footrest;
- maintain a better feeding posture by using a support pillow to raise the baby; and
- set up a nursing station where everything is handy, to avoid reaching and twisting.

Pushing a Stroller

Simply pushing a stroller can pose postural challenges, since your natural tendency is to lean forward, lock the elbows and extend the wrists while pushing. Make sure you

- keep the head and chin up, with ears over shoulders;
- keep the shoulders depressed and retracted slightly, with chest leading;
- hold the arms in a softly bent position, not locked;
- keep the wrists in neutral (carpal tunnel is prevalent in new moms);
- engage the abdominals throughout the movement; and
- take full, comfortable strides. ■



Carrying the Baby's Car Seat

The car seat that slips out of the car and snaps into a stroller may seem like a convenient invention, but it can be troublesome physically. Seats are often heavy and hard to hold, placing torque on your spine.

The best thing you can do is

- use the car seat carrier as little as possible, taking baby out of the seat and holding her close or putting her in a stroller. According to a study presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine, it is better to manually hold an infant and lift an object than to perform a lift while holding the baby in an infant carrier.

When the car seat is essential, you should

- use correct posture to pick it up: when removing the seat from the stroller, first find neutral spine; stand in front of the car seat with the seat at the center of the body; bend the legs and bring the seat in toward the body, engaging the core muscles while standing up. When taking the seat out of the car (or putting it in), get into the car. Keep the car seat close to the body and engage the abs when lifting. Be careful of twisting motions and of carrying the seat away from the body.
- use the biceps to hold the seat, rather than letting it hang from the end of the arm. A best-case scenario is to hold it in the center of the body like a laundry basket.

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