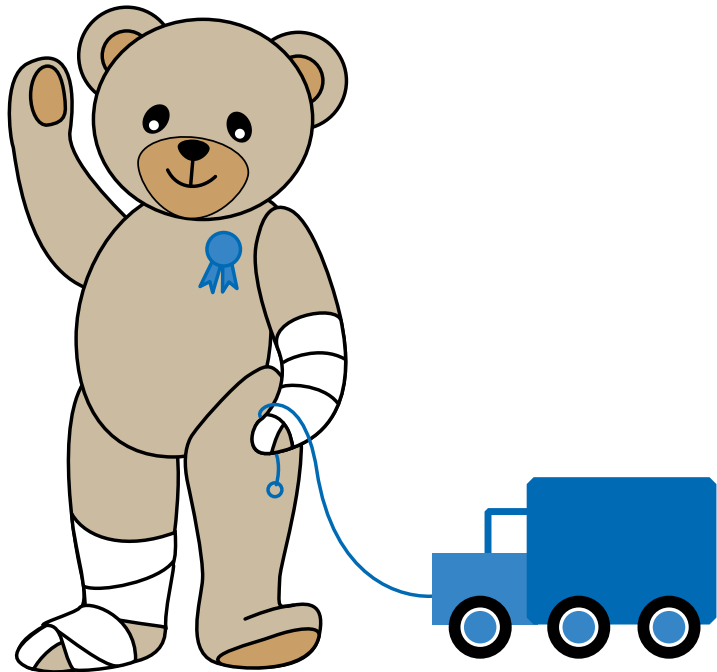


Physiotherapy activities for premature babies

Physiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet

Physiotherapy activities for premature babies

This leaflet is designed for parents of premature babies. It is a small series of activities to do with your baby, which you can start to do straight away. It is designed to remind you of the activities explained by the physiotherapist. The aim is to encourage your baby to develop normally and to prevent movement problems.

You can do these activities regularly with your baby. It is best to do them just before a feed. They will make your baby more awake for the feed and are best done on an empty stomach.

What activities are there to encourage awareness of the middle?

All babies' development begins with an awareness of the middle. You can do this in any position: with your baby lying on their back, on their side or sitting with support. You can also have your baby lying on your lap.

- Support your baby behind the shoulders and head. This will bring their shoulders and arms forward.
- Try and keep eye contact with your child.
- Encourage them to bring their hands together and play with their hands.
- Help your child to take their hands to their mouth and reach forward to touch your face.
- Try moving a toy into the middle and let the child grasp it. You can help your child by guiding their arms.

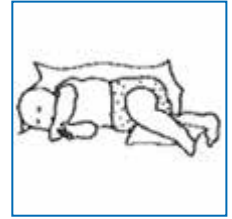


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- Put your child on their side and play with them in this position. This will encourage them to bring their hands together. You can support them by putting a pillow behind their back.



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- With your baby lying on their back, hold their hands across their chest. Hold their knees bent up towards their chest and gently roll their legs from side to side. This is teaching your baby to hold their head in the middle and to get their feet to the middle. You are also stretching their bottom muscles.



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What activities are there to encourage head control?

- Place your hands behind your child's shoulders. Gently support the head with your fingertips. Make sure they are looking at you with their head in the middle. Bring them slowly up to the sitting position. As your baby's head control improves you can gradually reduce the support.



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- As your baby's neck gets stronger you can sit your baby on your lap facing you. Put your hands behind their shoulders to bring the arms forward.
- Talk and play with your baby in this position, encouraging them to look at you.
- When they are steadier in sitting you can move your hands to hold the elbows instead so your baby has to work harder to sit.



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What activities are there to encourage rolling?

- Lay your baby on their back. Practice rolling from side to side. Put your hand on one hip and slowly move it over so that your child is lying on their side.
- Do this to both sides. Do it slowly so your child has time to move with you.
- When your child is able, you can help them to roll over on to their front.



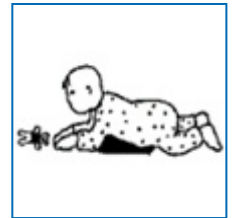
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How can I encourage tummy time?

- One of the most important things you can do for your baby is to put them on their tummy for play. Lying on their tummy is essential for their development and also helps to promote a round head shape. It encourages them to lift their head and strengthen their neck. It can also be a good position if your baby has wind.
- Put your baby on their front whilst lying on you. It will encourage your baby to lift their head up to look at you.
- You can support your baby a bit more by putting a towel or blanket under their shoulders.



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- In this position you can massage their back from top to bottom using 2-3 fingers of both hands down their legs and arms. Massage both sides of their back at the same time.



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Are there any other handling suggestions?

- Babies don't have much control of their movements. It can be comforting for your baby to be wrapped tightly in a swaddle blanket. Ask the physiotherapist or nursing staff to demonstrate this.
- A good position to play with your baby is sitting on the floor with your legs bent up. Put your baby in the crook of your legs. This puts your baby in a good position with their head in midline, their shoulders forwards and legs bent up. It also leaves you with two hands free to play with your baby, or to feed them, and encourages lots of eye contact.



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Reference sources

- The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists. Tummy Time, Tummy to play everyday.
 - <http://apcp.csp.org.uk/publications/tummy-time>
- BLISS – The Premature Baby Charity (2006). Handle me with care, supporting your premature baby's development.
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We hope this leaflet has been of help to you. For further information please do not hesitate to contact your physiotherapist.

This leaflet was written by the Paediatric Physiotherapy Team at Royal Surrey County Hospital.

Contact details

We hope this information has been helpful to you. If you require further information, please call:

Physiotherapy Department: 01483 464153

Hascombe Ward: 01483 464071

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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