Supporting play and learning with your new baby at home

Congratulations on the arrival of your new baby! We are delighted that you are now able to take your baby home. This handout contains some information to help make play time, sleep, and handling of your baby promote movement development and equal strength on both sides of the body.

At night-time – safe sleep

NOTE: Pillows and rolls, **must not** be used for sleep. They are only safe when the baby is awake and closely supervised.

The sleeping position for your baby should be on their back, with no pillows, blankets, toys, etc. in the bassinet.

Your baby will naturally turn their head to face your bed while sleeping.

To ensure even muscle strength is developed, and to avoid flat spots on the head, try to switch your baby's head position nightly. Your baby will naturally want to turn to you overnight. Either changing the position of the bassinette or putting baby in the bassinette the other way up (head to toe switch) helps give different movement experiences. You can also place baby in the cot with their head in a different position each night.

Swaddling

We recommend that your baby remains swaddled for sleep for the first 3 months when you get home. Swaddling has the following benefits:

- Gives baby a safe, comforting boundary – like the womb.
- Helps bring hands and arms into the middle – baby feels safe and can discover their own body.
- Enables baby to start to suck on fingers – as a soothing behaviour.
- Limits baby being upset / startled by their early / uncontrolled movement.



We like old-fashioned cloth wrap-type swaddles.
Baby's hands are under the chin, the arms are wrapped snugly but the bottom is loose to allow hip movement.

Play during the day

NOTE: Pillows and rolls **must not** be used for sleep. They must only be used when the baby is awake and closely supervised.

In the first 3 months of your baby arriving at home, their focus will be on:

1. Getting to know the people within the household, particularly those caring for them. Your baby is learning about love and trust.
2. Learning to control and move their body in a range of settings.
3. Growing and getting stronger.

When baby is awake and alert, this is the time to play. You will probably find you have two or three short play times each day in the first few weeks. Baby can play for short periods in some or all the following positions during a play session.

Playing on the back

This helps baby develop control of the head in the middle. The following tips can help to keep baby safe and supported in this position:

- Lay on firm surface e.g., playmat.
- Use peanut pillow or a rolled swaddle to assist your baby to keep their head in the middle.





The benefits of play time in this position:

- Helps strengthen their tummy and shoulder muscles.
- Reduces leg straightening and/or back arching.
- Helps their head become rounder.

Nappy changing times

During nappy changing time: it is recommended to use head support during both nappy changes UNTIL your baby can hold their head up in the middle on their own (develops between birth and 3 months old). *Please see images of head support options shown above.*

Nested on your lap



Another great position for your baby to spend time on their back is nested on your lap. The head and shoulders should be supported on your legs. Ensure you bend baby's hips and place legs upwards towards your trunk so they can see and touch their feet. Bring their hands together or to their face to suck their fingers or to grasp a toy.

Activities to do in this position include:

- Holding hands, massaging hands, hands to mouth, holding and touching toys of different textures.
- Head and face massage.
- Cycle their legs and massage their tummy with clockwise circles if they have wind or constipation.
- Looking at your face, toys, or black and white pictures moving slowly side to side.
- Have a chat, sing, tell stories and copy your baby's early sounds - start early communication.

Nests on the floor



You may also choose to have your baby in a nest on the floor for supported activities. To set up a nest on the floor:

1. Sit your baby up against a pillow.
2. Roll a towel/swaddle into a long 'sausage' and put it under your baby's knees, alongside their torso and behind shoulders – this keeps their hips and knees bent up, shoulders forwards and hands together.
3. You may also use a rolled swaddle or peanut pillow under their head to keep head in the middle (if needed).



In this position you can use your face or toys to encourage your baby to tuck their chin, bring their hands to the middle and look down to their hands and knees. You can also place a small ring or toy in baby's hands to grasp and suck to encourage these movements.

NOTE: This should only be set up on the floor (not bed/couch) while baby is awake and supervised.

Side lying play

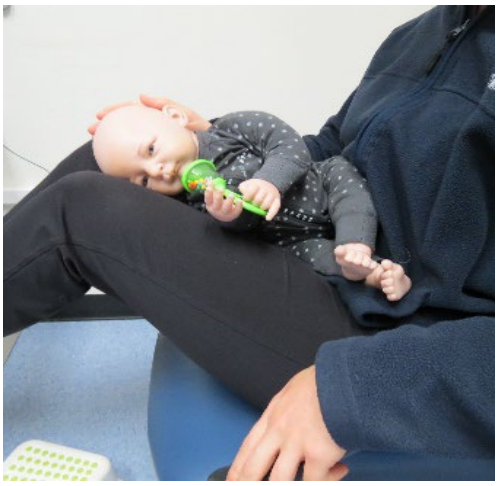
Side lying makes it easy for your baby to bring both hands together for play. Try short periods of supervised awake playtime (on both sides). Support your baby's hips to stay curled up by using a rolled towel behind their back, but not behind their head. Baby can practice tucking chin down to look at their hands.

You could also choose to have your baby in side lying on your lap. Roll your baby on your lap to play for a few minutes each side. Put your feet up on support so you are comfortable, and their head is up.

Playtime can include activities such as:

- Exploring with hands in mouth.
- Holding or mouthing a toy or touching your face if you lie next to them, face to face.





The importance of early tummy time

Tummy time is important for baby's head control. Your baby will gain shoulder strength and stability with regular practice of tummy time. Though tummy time is hard work for your baby it can be enjoyable!

Start tummy time at term (40 weeks): 30 sec - 1 minute is *plenty* of time at this age. Aim for a few tries throughout the day.

By 6 weeks: Progress to 2 or 3 minutes a few times a day.

Tummy time can happen in lots of ways:

- Start on your chest with support for the shoulders.
- On a pillow with a rolled towel under chest.
- Progress to tummy time flat on the bed with only the rolled towel (remove the pillow).



Playtime can include tummy time activities such as:

- Looking at you and watching your face while you chat.
- Look at a mirror toy or focus on a black and white picture book watching activity in the room or outdoors e.g., siblings, pets.



Handling your baby safely: carrying and picking up

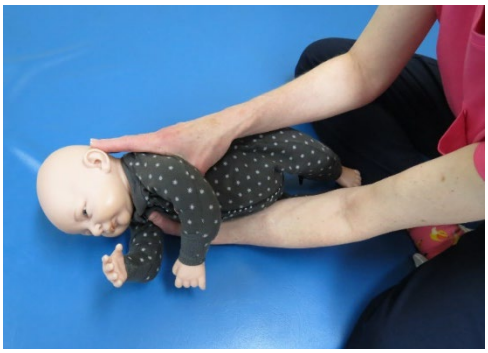




Remember to carry on left and right sides so baby has an even movement experience!

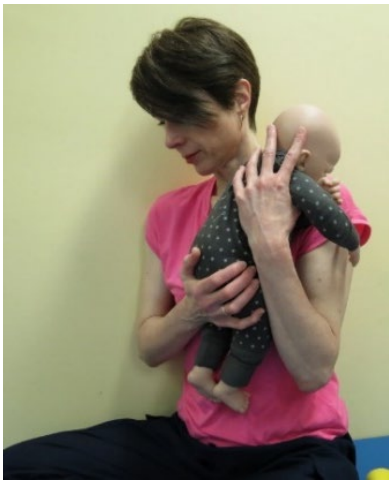
Picking up your baby by turning to the side first











Baby feels rotation and this is a good movement to learn.
Each movement into a side-lying position helps baby develop head control.
Remember to practice both left and right sides!

More information and support

Call KEMH physio department if you are unsure about doing these play activities with your baby.
Tel:64582790

	Physiotherapy: Going home talk video (YouTube) To see this information as a video - please scan this QR code to view or use this address. https://tinyurl.com/KEMH-Physio-Going-Home-talk Subtitles in various languages are also available from settings in YouTube.
	For more help: **At KEMH**: Discuss concerns with your paediatrician. **At home:** Discuss concerns with your GP. **At your Child Health Nurse visit:** If you have concerns about your baby's development raise it with your Child Health Nurse You can also self-refer to your local Child Development Services (CDS) for assessment using the QR code to the left or use this address below: https://tinyurl.com/CAHSreferrals • Rural families please use WA Country Health Services link. • Metro families use the Metropolitan CDS Referral Form.

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