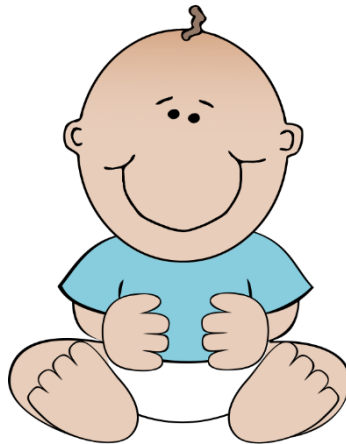




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Coping With Your Baby When You Have Arthritis



Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

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You have been given this booklet as you are pregnant or have recently had a baby. Looking after a baby is challenging for everybody but there can be extra challenges when you also have arthritis.

There are things you can do to manage your symptoms and you should find it easier to manage your symptoms so that both you and your baby are safe and comfortable.

Everyone experiences arthritis differently. This booklet outlines the various options that you can explore to help you manage your symptoms. All of the options have the potential to help you.

It can be helpful to think of your baby as a new project and plan for it accordingly. Baby-proof your house when you have more time and energy. Consider the equipment that will be easiest to use if you are having a bad day or flare up before making expensive purchases.

Try to work within your pain levels and activity tolerance, and do not be afraid to ask for help. There may be particular tasks that are impossible or better left until someone else is around to help.

Most importantly, give yourself credit for doing your best.

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1. Sleeping

A cot attached to the bed is worth considering. You can slide the baby from the cot onto your bed for nursing.



A drop-sided cot isn't the standard type of cot however, it is much easier to lower one side of the cot than to lean in really low to pick up your baby. If you can't get hold of, or afford a drop-sided cot, get an ordinary one although, ensure it has fittings which allow you to raise the mattress up high in the cot's frame while baby is small, then lower it in stages as he/she grows.

Alternatively, make sure you have an armchair next to the baby's cot/Moses basket so you do not have to carry your baby far during the night when he/she wakes.

2. Lifting/carrying your baby

There may be opportunities to delegate carrying eg somebody to bring baby downstairs in the morning and take upstairs in the evening.

Sometimes using gadgets and equipment is not enough. Good posture and positioning is vital to limit your pain and fatigue. It is best to do this as soon as your baby arrives rather than waiting for aches and pains to develop.

Try to remember to pick up your baby in stages, take your time, and use your hand as a scoop.



Scoop your baby forward, put forearm behind neck to take some weight, and then hand under bottom.

*Even when your baby starts gaining neck control try to **avoid lifting him/her under the arms** as shown as this position may put too much pressure on the base of your thumbs.*



A carrying sling may help; do your research. Sling libraries allow you to trial slings for a short period (see page 13).

If you have a bad neck or shoulders, a waist belt with a step on it (HippyChick) may help. This is helpful once your baby is old enough to carry on your hip. For one handed lifters a Snuggl Bundl may be helpful.



Consider the position of your back when you are lifting your baby.



Try to do everything at waist level. For example, put baby's bouncy seat on a tabletop (secure it or tie it to the wall for safety). Put baby on the sofa (you can get a special 'bed' bar in Mothercare, which slides under the sofa cushions and creates a barrier to stop baby from slipping sideways). Alternatively, buy a rocker for your Moses basket to raise its height.

'Tummy with Mummy' may be used to allow tummy time at a higher level, such as on a table.



3. Changing your baby

It is important to conserve your energy as much as possible. If you have room, it is beneficial to have changing stations both upstairs and downstairs. If possible, arrange a changing area next to the cot to cut down on carrying distances. A trolley on wheels can be helpful for carrying things and a flask can be used to carry hot water.

Rolling the baby and placing a flannel or towel under their lower back can make it easier to clean their bottom. Saying “one, two, three, roll” will help the baby learn to assist, as they get older. Advise anybody else who will be assisting with changing to use the same technique so your baby knows what to expect.

Height is an important feature to consider and will depend on whether you intend to stand or sit to change your baby. Alternatively, you may consider something adjustable. Other points to consider are:

- ✚ How you can prevent a child rolling off.
- ✚ Whether there is space for changing equipment such as nappies, wipes and a change of clothes.
- ✚ Whether you want to be able to move the changing area and lock its wheels.

4. Bathing your baby

Get someone to do this if you can! Otherwise, consider using a plastic baby bath on the kitchen table (fill it with jugs of warm water from the kettle). A Puj Tub can be used to bathe your baby in your sink. You may want to perch on a stool to avoid unnecessary stooping.



If you have to use the bath for your baby, use a bathing sling to support his/her weight.



Bathing your toddler

Use a stool at the side of the bath to sit on. Place a towel on your lap whilst sitting on the stool. Ask your toddler to stand, turn away from

you and put their bottom on the bath lip, which has the other end of the towel on it. Whilst sat on the stool, slide your toddler onto your lap and wrap him/her up with the towel. This saves lifting up the toddler from the bath.

5. Nursing/feeding

When seated, use a cushion or bean bag to hold your baby up close. You can buy specific breastfeeding cushions, which leave both hands free. Even if you are not breastfeeding, positioning your baby on a cushion in front of you will make it easier for feeding. Beanbags can be lighter to hold than a cushion. They may also have the added benefit of being able to remove the beans to accommodate the baby as it grows.



Beenezy have a good range of beanbags and can make bespoke products but you may want to shop around for cheaper alternatives.

6. Pram/Car seat

There are hundreds of prams and buggies on the market. Styles and features frequently change from year to year. Features to consider include:

- + Intended use - indoor, outdoor or multi-use ie a travel system that includes a car seat. When the car seat is on the pushchair it will bring the baby higher but you may need to consider whether you could lift the car seat in/out of the car. If you have difficulty carrying your baby, consider using a buggy indoors.
- + Height and style of handle, whether it is height adjustable.
- + Would a swivel seat be easier?
- + Ease of use of brake.
- + Manoeuvrability and suspension.
- + Weight/bulk when pushed and when folded.
- + Ease of folding.
- + Seat height and depth.
- + Storage space and handles on the back to hang things from, so you do not have to carry heavy shopping bags as well as pushing the pram.
- + If you have difficulty with pressing the button, a gadget such as a Car Seat Key may be helpful.



7. Dressing

Baby-grows with poppers can be difficult. Those with zips/velcro/magnets may be easier to pull on/off. Aldi occasionally sells baby grows with zips. See useful website details below for further information.

Instead of baby grows consider two-piece suits ie baby bottoms with feet and an envelope neck top. These may be readily bought from high street stores, online and supermarkets.



Envelope-neck baby vests can be washed with the poppers permanently done up and you can slide them up over your baby's body. To remove, slide them down over your baby's shoulders and down the body.

Remember, once your baby can hold his/her head up it gets a bit easier (you do not need to keep your hand constantly under the baby's head). It gets easier once the baby can be carried on your hip (as you can use your forearms, not your hands).

Buying a grab stick can allow you to pick up things from the floor without bending.

8. Further reading & Online Resources

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Disability/Pages/help-for-disabled-parents.aspx

www.disabledparent.org.uk - Pregnancy and Parenthood is run entirely by volunteers.

Sling libraries

For up-to-date sessions in South Wales visit:

<http://www.carrymeclose.co.uk/sling-hire.html> or

<https://ukslinglibraries.wordpress.com/find-a-sling-library-near-you/>.

Sling libraries are subject to change. Do check before attending to avoid a wasted journey.

Canton Cardiff: every Tuesday 9:30am-12:00pm at the Chapter Arts Centre, Market Road, CF5 1QE.

Penarth: every first Wednesday of the month at All Saints Church, Victoria Square, 10:00am-11:30am (alongside breastfeeding support group 'Baby Latte')

Newport: every first Friday of the month at Rogerstone Ty Du Community Hall, 12:30-pm-2:30pm

Monmouthshire:

<http://www.severnandwyeslinglibrary.wordpress.com/>

Pontyclun: every 2nd/3rd Monday of the month at Bethel Baptist Church, 10:30am-12:00pm, alongside breastfeeding support group 'Llantrissant breastfeeding support group'.

Caerphilly: has numerous drop-in sessions. You can find details by visiting: <https://cardiffandcaerphillynctslings.myturn.com/library/>