

Therapeutic Positioning, Signs of Stress, & Calming Techniques

What is therapeutic positioning and why is it important to my baby?

Positioning is used in the NICU to support a baby's immature nervous system. Your womb is a dynamic and supportive environment. Since your baby was born prematurely, it is important to mimic that environment as best we can. We must take into account your baby's medical status and equipment needs when establishing a comfortable environment to support your baby's immature neurological and physical systems. Appropriate supportive positioning in the NICU can decrease your baby's length of stay and improve motor development and performance now and in the future.

In general, what is important to consider when positioning my baby?

When your baby is properly positioned, she should look comfortable and have boundaries around her entire body, such as a Snuggle-up positioner or a blanket roll. It is important to always use a gel cushion under your baby's head. This decreases the pressure on her head and can prevent future skull deformities. In general, ideal positioning for your baby is with her arms and legs in midline and in a flexed position. This promotes self-calming and improves oral feeding in the future.

What should my baby look like when he is on his back?

Your baby's head should be in midline (pressure is on the back of his head and he is looking straight up at the ceiling). He may need assistance of a bean bag "frog" to maintain the position. This is important for decreasing pressure on the sides of his head and prevents head flattening. Your baby's shoulders should be supported from behind, allowing him to bring his hands together and to his mouth for self-soothing. Your baby's hips and knees should be bent with support from behind and on the sides. The support from the side helps to eliminate a "frog-leg" (hip abduction) position, which can lead to a toe-out pattern of walking.



What should my baby look like when she is on her side?

Your baby's arms should be positioned in front to allow her to bring her hands together and to her mouth for self-soothing. There should be support at her back and buttocks to facilitate a tucked position and a roll should be placed between the baby's knees to support the upper hip. The tucked/flexed position aids in development of proper posture, alignment of the arms and legs, and spinal curvatures.





What should my baby look like when he is on his belly?

Your baby should be positioned on his tummy in a tucked or flexed position. He may need a small pillowcase pad underneath him to allow his knees and hips to be bent and his shoulders to come forward. Prolonged shoulder retraction (backwards), can lead to a tight shoulder girdle which decreases the ability for play and reaching activities in the future. The head should be turned either left or right, and the direction should be changed each time he is on his belly. This will prevent neck tightness and head flattening.



How does my baby tell me that she is stressed or irritable?

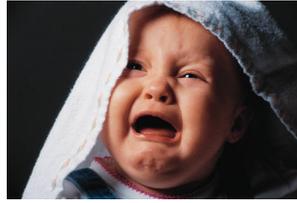
Babies show signs of stress in order to communicate that whatever is happening to them, is overstimulating. They might show these signs during a diaper change, bath, clothing change, or even just with the touch of your hands. The signs of stress for a premature baby include:

- Changes in their skin color (either red, gray, white, or bluish)
- Changes in their vital signs (either increased or decreased): Heart rate, oxygen saturation, blood pressure, or respiratory rate
- Arching her back or extending her neck
- Flailing movements of her arms and/or legs
- Splaying her fingers
- Saluting
- Gaze aversion (looking away from you)
- A worried or panicked look on her face
- Crying
- These last few signs should occur in combination with at least one of the other ones listed above to be considered a sign of stress:
 - Gagging
 - Hiccups
 - Sneezing
 - Yawning

How can I help to calm my baby when he is stressed?



Premature babies can be hypersensitive to movement, changing positions, and even gentle touch. Their perception of touch can be exaggerated and stressful to them. It is important to recognize when a baby is showing signs of stress and to use calming techniques to decrease or avoid the stress response. Initial contact your premature baby should be gentle constant pressure with your hand placed at your baby's head and the other hand at his feet. You can also gently place his hands across his chest or let him grasp your finger. Do not stroke your baby during this time. This can trigger irritability in your baby. Eventually, the physical therapist can teach you massage techniques once your baby is ready for it. Slow gentle movements, rest periods, and/or using a pacifier can help your baby reorganize to a calmer state. Swaddling a baby in a Snuggly or blanket is ideal, but the baby must be medically stable. Until that time, gentle boundaries will give your baby a sense of containment and can be accomplished by use of blanket rolls, bumpers, or other positioning equipment.



SEÑALES DE ESTRÉS

- ❖ Arquearse la espalda
- ❖ Saludar
- ❖ Extensión de brazos y piernas
- ❖ Apartar la mirada
- ❖ Irritabilidad
- ❖ Reflejo vomitivo
- ❖ Bostezos
- ❖ Cambio de Color: Piel Roja o Azul
- ❖ Llorar
- ❖ Movimientos agitados
- ❖ Extenderse los dedos
- ❖ Mirada asustada o preocupada
- ❖ Temblores o movimientos nerviosos
- ❖ Estornudos
- ❖ Hipos
- ❖ Cambios en los Signos Vitales: ritmo cardíaco, saturación de oxígeno, presión arterial, frecuencia respiratoria

😊 ¡Reconocer y reaccionar a estas señales alegrarán a usted y su bebé! 😊



TÉCNICAS DE RELAJACIÓN

- ❖ Póngale una mano en la cabeza y/o pies.
- ❖ Júntele las manos.
- ❖ Déjele chupar su dedo pulgar, otros dedos, o mano.
- ❖ Envuélvalo fuertemente con una cobija.
- ❖ Si el bebé está en una cuna, sostenerlo y acunarlo puede ser eficaz. También intente darle un golpecito en el trasero y/o calmarlo.