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baby

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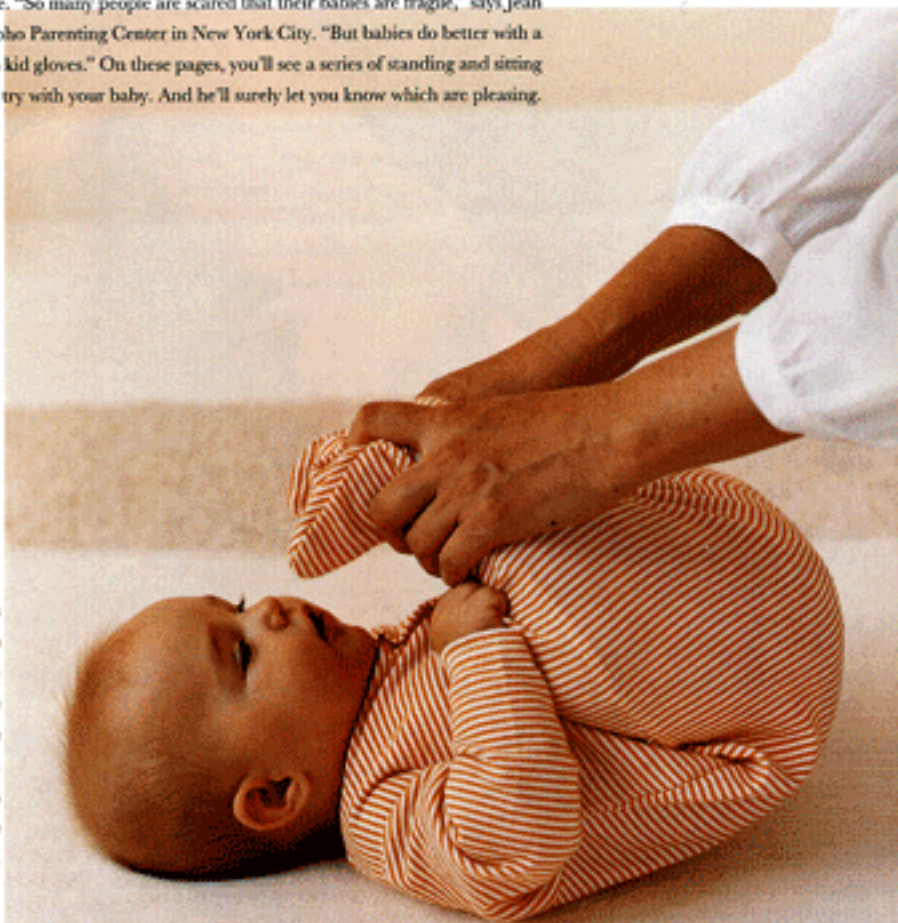
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soothing holds

BABIES LOVE TO BE HELD, and for good reason. When you lift your child, you provide the intimacy of physical contact as well as the support he needs to get a good look at his surroundings. And it's never more important to offer that comfort than when your baby is fussy or gassy. A colicky or otherwise uncomfortable baby can seem downright inconsolable—and nonstop crying can be unsettling for parents, too. But with a few basic principles in mind, you can find positions and movements for your baby that will make both of you feel better. Babies often swallow air along with food, which can not only make them feel full, but also force their little digestive tracts to pass gas, which can be painful. In many instances, all you need to do to soothe your baby is shift his position and the placement of your hands; as a result, you will break up gas bubbles and help bring up burps, relieving abdominal pressure. "So many people are scared that their babies are fragile," says Jean Kunhardt, director of the Soho Parenting Center in New York City. "But babies do better with a strong, firm touch than with kid gloves." On these pages, you'll see a series of standing and sitting positions and movements to try with your baby. And he'll surely let you know which are pleasing.

Many of the ways parents instinctively hold or play with their babies can also comfort little ones when they're gassy; you need only make a few strategic adjustments.

Wyatt, 4 months, and his mother, Marilee, demonstrate the Toes-to-Nose position.



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSH TITUS

Before picking up your baby, wash your hands thoroughly. As you reach for him, speak to him in a gentle voice and make eye contact so the swoop of your grasp will not come as a shock. Always support the baby's head, not only because a wobbly neck needs your help, but also because moving around can create a frightening feeling of free fall unless the head and neck are bolstered.

standing positions



STANDARD BURPING HOLD When lifting a baby from horizontal to vertical, you may normally hold him at your shoulder, and his head may naturally come to rest near your collarbone. But try boosting him higher, so his belly is against your shoulder. The resulting pressure will help him burp and ease abdominal cramping.



(Continued) With slight adjustments, this hold is also a comfortable way to carry your baby, and can provide you with a free hand if you need it. When holding a baby with one hand, be sure to fit his buttocks into your elbow, then slide your forearm up his back so your hand can support his neck and head.



DOWN THE ARM Hold your baby horizontally, facedown in front of you, with your forearm beneath his legs and abdomen to provide support and light pressure; place your hand on his chin to support his neck. Then use your other hand to pat his back, helping the gas to come forth. You can also carry him this way.



FOOTBALL HOLD As its name implies, you tuck your baby into the crook of your arm. Your bottom hand reaches toward his legs, while your top hand runs along his back, up from his buttocks; this provides abdominal pressure. This hold is best suited for an older baby who is capable of holding up his own head.



FRONT HOLD "Once babies hatch out of the newborn stage, they love to look around," says Kunhardt. This hold cheers up a baby by encouraging that sense of adventure. A gentle squeeze to his abdomen will also help relieve gas. Hold your baby in front of you, facing out, and fold your arms together under his.

sitting positions



CRADLING HOLD... This position is often the most natural way to hold a younger baby while sitting down to feed him. And it is easy to shift from this hold into other ones when it's time to burp him. Start with the baby across your lap, the crook of your arm supporting his head, and your forearm running along his side.



...TO SITTING CHIN HOLD Some gas may pass as you move him into a sitting-up position. Slide your cradling arm back until your hand is under his head. Move your other hand toward his face, placing your thumb and fingers in a V around his chin. Support his head and neck from both sides as you tilt his upper body forward.



(Continued) To further soothe a case of reflux or to aid digestion, bring the baby into a full sitting position. While supporting his face and neck with one hand, slowly lean his entire body forward; you can provide additional support from behind by raising one of your legs slightly. Pat your baby gently on his back.



SIT AND SWAY If patting your baby's back does not relieve his discomfort, try this alternative: With one hand supporting his back and head from behind and the other supporting his chest and neck, slowly rotate his upper body. The object is to give a gentle jostle to any annoying gas that is trapped in the baby's digestive tract.

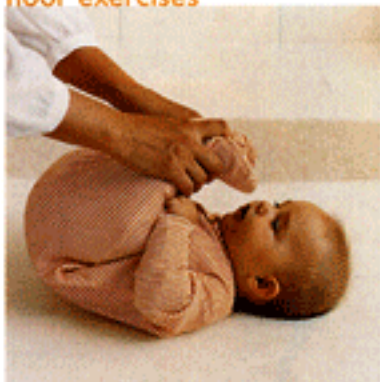


LYING ACROSS LAP You might also try laying your baby facedown across your lap with his head resting on one of your legs and his stomach on the other. The natural pressure of his belly against your knee is another way to relieve tummy pain. Keep him firmly in place with one hand, and use the other to rub his back.



SITTING FRONT HOLD Sit the baby on your lap facing forward with his back resting against your chest and stomach. You can either hold him under his arms and slip your thumbs behind his shoulders, or cross your arms, which exerts a bit of pressure on his abdomen. For extra pressure, slowly rock him forward and back.

floor exercises



TOES-TO-NOSE While the baby lies on the floor or another flat surface, such as a changing table, try these basic exercises to help ease cramps; the two of you will have some fun playing at the same time. For this technique, touch your baby's feet together, then slowly bring them up until they nearly reach his face.



BICYCLE Bicycling is another activity that many babies enjoy. Lay your baby on his back. Extend one of his legs while you push the other up toward his waist; then carefully pull the bunched leg toward you and push the straight leg away. This should help to alleviate cramping; it also can relieve constipation.



HAND MASSAGE A gentle massage can also help to release gas bubbles. Place the side of your hand, pinkie-side down, on your baby's sternum; press in lightly and slide your hand down his belly toward his waist. Repeat. Between strokes, you can play on your baby's stomach with your fingers; he will love your touch.



HAND MASSAGE (alternate) You can also use the heel of your palm to rub your baby's stomach in a circular motion. Place the heel of your palm at his abdomen, press slightly, and move your hand clockwise. As your baby enjoys the massage, expect some new facial expressions—and, perhaps, some gas to pass.



You can try various positions until you find the ones that work best for your baby, and the two of you will both rest easier as a reward.