

Erb's Palsy

This leaflet is for parents whose baby has been diagnosed with Erb's Palsy, which affects the nerves that supply the arm. It tells you about the exercises you should do with your baby to help correct this condition. If your baby has a broken bone, do not start these exercises until your physiotherapist tells you. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your physiotherapist.

What is Erb's Palsy?

Erb's Palsy is a condition that happens after a difficult birth, when the baby's head or arm has been pulled during delivery. The pulling may affect from one to all five nerves that supply the movement and feeling to either arm (brachial plexus). The arm can be partially or completely paralysed (unable to move or feel) depending on the amount of damage that the nerves have received or the number of nerves affected.

Recovery depends on how much damage has been done to the nerve. If the nerves are only bruised or swollen, the paralysis may get better in the first days or month. It is difficult to predict what improvement there will be but in time your doctor or physiotherapist will be able to give you an idea. 80-90% of children recover completely.

Erb's Palsy is diagnosed after an assessment by either a midwife or doctor. You will be referred to a physiotherapist to be taught exercises.

Gentle exercises to the arm will help to stimulate the nerves and encourage the return of feeling and movement. It is important to do the exercises regularly to stop the arm getting stiff (e.g. with every nappy change).

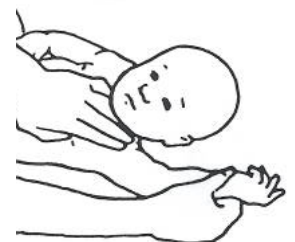
The exercises

Exercises should be carried out while your baby is relaxed and should never be forced or painful. Do the exercises slowly and steadily with your baby lying on their back. You can start these exercises when your baby is a couple of days old.

Exercise 1

Shoulder flexion:

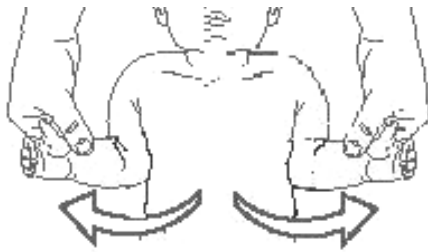
Lift your baby's arm above their head whilst supporting their shoulder with the other hand, keeping the elbow straight. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat 5 times.



Exercise 2

Shoulder rotation:

With the baby's arm down by their side and their elbow bent to 90 degrees, move their hand out away from their body as far as it comfortably goes and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



Exercise 3

Elbow flexion:

Hold the elbow joint in one hand and bend the elbow to touch the baby's face with their free hand. Repeat 10 times.



Exercise 4

Upper arm rotation:

Hold the baby's arm at 90 degrees from the body with the elbow bent. Grasp the wrist firmly between two fingers. Rotate the lower arm so the palm of the hand is facing upwards. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



Exercise 5

Forearm supination:

Hold the arm as for shoulder rotation.

Turn the palm of the hand over so it is facing upwards.

Hold for 10 seconds and repeat 5 times.



Exercise 6

Wrist and hand movement:

Stabilizing the forearm with one hand, hold your baby's hand with your other hand. Gently bend the wrist forward and back 5 times.

Then with the wrist in a relaxed position bend your baby's fingers as if making a fist and then gently straighten them out, repeat 5 times.



General advice

- You can stimulate the skin on the affected arm after you have bathed your baby by briskly rubbing it dry. This will help with the return of sensation in the arm.
- Always put the weak arm into clothes first when dressing and take it out last when undressing. Try to dress your baby in loose-fitting clothes until the arm starts to regain some movement so it is easier to dress them without causing injury to their arm.

- Make sure your baby is swaddled in a blanket to help support their arm when laying them on their back to sleep or moving them around.
- You can still lay your baby on their tummy or side. You may need to position their arm under them like they do on their other side. Only lay them on their affected side for short periods of time.

References:

1. R Shepherd (1995) *Physiotherapy in Paediatrics*, 2nd edn. Great Britain P 196-202 - Butterworth-Heinemann Oxford.
2. Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapist (2012) *Obstetric Brachial Plexus Palsy: A guide to Management*. www.apcp.org.uk
3. Therapy Skill Builders (1987) A division of Communication Skill Builders

Further information

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This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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