Brachial Plexus Palsy is caused by trauma to the nerves of the arm. This trauma may have caused muscle weakness, lack of movement and lack of feeling in your baby's arm. Your child will most likely improve as they get older. How much the arm improves depends on the type of injury and the treatment your child receives.

Physical therapy (PT) or occupational therapy (OT) can help your baby best use their affected arm. You play an important role in your child's therapy. Therapists can work with you to encourage motor skills and maintain motion in the arm. Only do these activities when a physical or occupational therapist tells you to.

**Range of motion**

Therapists can work with you to promote movement and prevent the joints from becoming permanently stiff.

Do the stretches 3 to 5 times each day. Hold stretches for 5 seconds. You can do the stretches as part of your baby's daily activities. Support your baby when you do the stretches described and pictured below. Think of stretching the arm while your baby is feeding or during diaper changes. Gently, move your baby's arm as far as you can without resistance or pain.

- **Shoulder External Rotation:** These 2 stretches are the most important for your baby. They will help keep your baby's shoulder flexible. If the shoulder becomes tight, the joint can dislocate. Doing these stretches correctly will not hurt your baby or their shoulder. In fact, doing these stretches is the best way to keep the shoulder joint healthy and prevent dislocation.

  Do both of these stretches 3 to 5 times each day.

Position your child's arm at their side with the elbow bent at 90 degrees and the palm of the hand facing up. Place 1 hand behind your baby's shoulder and your other hand at their elbow. Using your hand at the elbow, rotate your baby's arm away from their body. Be sure to keep the upper arm touching the body during the stretch. Hold for 5 seconds.

Bring the arm straight out to the side with the elbow bent. Slowly turn the arm so that the palm is facing up and hold for 5 seconds.
Also, do these other stretches marked with a check ☑ 3 to 5 times each day:

- **Shoulder flexion**: Slowly lift the arm forward and over the head. Hold for 5 seconds and then bring the arm back down.

- **Elbow flexion and extension**: Bend your baby’s elbow. Bring the hand up to the mouth, keep the palm facing up. Hold for 5 seconds and then completely straighten the elbow. Hold the straightened position for 5 seconds.

- **Forearm supination**: Support your baby’s elbow at 90 degrees with 1 hand, and hold your baby’s forearm just above the wrist with your other hand. Gently turn their forearm so that their palm is facing upward. Be careful not to twist your baby’s wrist. Hold this position for 5 seconds.

- **Wrist and finger extension**: Gently open your baby’s fingers and thumb so the hand is open and flat. Move the wrist up and keep the fingers straight. Hold for 5 seconds.

- **Wrist side to side movement (radial and ulnar deviation)**: Gently move your baby’s wrist sideways toward the thumb and then toward the little finger. Hold each position for 5 seconds.
Positioning

Your baby may not have feeling in their arm. Without this feeling they may not be aware of where their arm is when lying or rolling. They may not be able to move the arm into the best position on their own. You may need to help position your baby’s arm safely throughout the day. Do not pin or wrap your baby’s arm close to their body. This may cause arm tightness that may not stretch out later.

0 to 3 months

Your baby needs to spend time in a variety of positions to help with development. When awake, position your baby on their back, tummy and both sides. Make sure your child does not rest or sleep with their head turned the same way each time. This position may lead to tightness on 1 side of your child’s neck or changes in the shape of their head.

**Back:** Encourage your baby to turn their head to both sides to look at toys or pictures. Position yourself on the side of your baby’s affected arm so that they will turn to that side to look at you.

**Tummy:** It is important for your baby to spend awake time on their tummy many times during the day. Take special care to protect the affected arm by keeping the arm close to their body. Your baby may tolerate this position better on a small roll or wedge. Even brief periods of tummy time are helpful.

**Supported side-lying:** Your baby should spend time lying on both sides when awake. You may use a roll or pillow behind them for support. Bring both hands together in front. Make sure the affected arm is not positioned underneath the body when lying on that side.

**Carrying and feeding:** When you pick up your baby, provide support behind the shoulders. Bring the affected arm forward and keep it supported. The arm should not hang or fall behind the body. Do not lift your baby by the arms. You can swaddle your baby for feeding to help support the arm if needed.

**Car seat and swing:** Use rolled towels along the side of your baby’s body to help support the affected arm.
3 to 6 months

If your baby is not moving their affected arm, continue to provide support. Review the positioning section on pages 4 and 5.

Have your child play on their tummy several times each day. Your baby’s elbows should be in front of their shoulders. Use a small, rolled towel under their chest and behind their elbows to help support the affected arm. This position will help your baby strengthen their neck and shoulders and put some weight on their affected arm.

Playtime

The nerves in your baby’s arm provide sensation or feeling to the arm. It is hard to tell exactly what your baby is feeling with their affected arm. At first, your baby may not show awareness of the affected arm.

Playtime will help your baby become more aware of their affected arm. It can provide an opportunity for the recovering arm to become used to feeling touch. As the muscles become stronger, encourage your baby to use their affected arm the best they can during play. Here are some ways you can help your baby during playtime.

0 to 3 months

Massage

Massage is a nice way to help your baby become more aware of their affected arm. Use slow and gentle strokes to massage both arms. Place your baby in a supported position on their back. You may support their affected arm with a rolled towel behind the shoulder.

Help your baby become more aware of their affected side. Bring their arm up in front of their face and stroke it, kiss it, or clap their hands together. At 2 to 3 months of age, you can start placing small rattles or toys into their affected hand. Touch and play with both of your baby’s arms during bath time. Use a soft cloth to wash both arms. After bath time, dry with a towel and then apply lotion to both arms.

3 to 6 months

Continue to touch and massage both of your baby’s arms. See the massage section above for more information.

As your baby grows and is more active, help them use their affected arm as much as possible. Provide lightweight toys they can reach for, bat, move, grasp and explore.
6 to 12 months
Your baby may still enjoy massage of their affected arm and hand. Review the massage section on page 6. Many babies begin to enjoy play activities that will provide touch sensation to the affected arm.

Some examples are playing with pudding on a highchair tray and playing in the bath with a sponge, washcloth or bath foam. As your baby grows, help them to use their affected arm as much as possible and in different ways throughout the day. Make a game to encourage active reaching. Use songs with hand motions to engage your baby and gain their cooperation. Help them reach forward to a toy or mirror to use and stretch the affected arm.

If your baby is having trouble learning to roll, crawl or stand, your therapist will give you some ideas to help them.

Dressing
Put clothes on the affected arm first. When you undress your baby, take clothes off the affected arm last. This will prevent overstretching of your baby's arm.

Splinting
Sometimes we recommend a hand, elbow or shoulder splint for the affected arm. A splint supports your baby’s joints, maintains range of motion, and improves function. Your therapist will make the splint and give you instructions for wear and care if needed.

What can I do to help my baby if they need surgery?
If your baby needs surgery, your therapist will give you positioning and range of motion instructions for after the surgery.

Additional suggestions to help your baby
To Learn More
- Brachial Plexus Clinic Scheduling
  206-987-2759
- Therapy Scheduling
  206-987-2113
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services
- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Seattle Children’s offers free interpreter services for patients, family members and legal representatives who are deaf or hard of hearing or speak a language other than English. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your healthcare provider.

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