

# Early Days with Clubfoot

The arrival of your new baby can be both exciting and daunting, and most definitely life changing. If your baby has been born with one or both feet that curl or turn inwards you will be guided with care and treatment options depending on the severity.

Methods such as Ponseti are successful as they gradually encourage the foot into a normal position by holding the foot and lower leg in a continued stretch. Our bodies have both plastic and elastic qualities. Holding the foot with a cast or brace targets the plasticity in our system, to bring about change. Your baby's foot is soft and pliable, not all the bones are formed, so treatment in these early days is important. Their feet do not fully develop until the age of 15 years.



While you are settling in to life with your new baby here are a few ideas and things you can do safely at home to start and support the process of change and prepare your baby for what may lie ahead.....

## Massage

Massaging your baby is a great way to get to know their body, it feels good and helps with bonding by releasing the good hormones. Touching, holding, gently squeezing and massaging continues the touch that they were receiving inside the womb which is important for sensory input, their body awareness and neural development. Touch also conveys a sense of safety and trust.



Whilst your baby was in the womb they were gently rocked and moved, they felt the heart beat, vibrations of digestion and breath. They react with movement upon touch from within their environment and their brain has been teaching them how to move and respond. Movement helps the development of their vestibular system (balance and awareness) and they need you to keep them moving.

## Movement

### Getting started:

- Massage skin to skin is best, use organic/cold-pressed plant oil if you like. For leg & foot massage use pressure that makes a slight dent when you push in, be gentle and slow
- Movements need to be rhythmical and slow
- Grab these moments when your baby is awake, eyes bright and they are happy, tend to all their other needs first. If they start fussing or crying stop as it may be enough stimulation, or they may need something else

# Massage - Leg & Foot

- Hold their legs in your hands, bounce them up and down.
- Take one leg and sweep your hand/s from their hip to toes (x2). Repeat on other leg.
- Place the fingertips of your left hand gently into their left groin and slowly stroke towards their inside ankle, continue under their foot to the toes (x2). Repeat on right.
- Place your right fingertips under their left leg just below their bottom, slowly stroke down to their heel (x2). Repeat on right.
- Use your thumbs or fingertips to stroke the soles of their feet from their toes to heels.
- Gently squeeze and massage each toe.
- Again, using thumbs or fingertips massage in small circles the top of their foot from toes to ankle.
- Continue these small circles up the front of their leg (x2). Repeat on other leg.
- Repeat the small circles up the side of their leg from ankle to hip (x2). Repeat on other leg.
- Hold their legs once again in your hands, bounce them gently up and down, encouraging them to relax them.



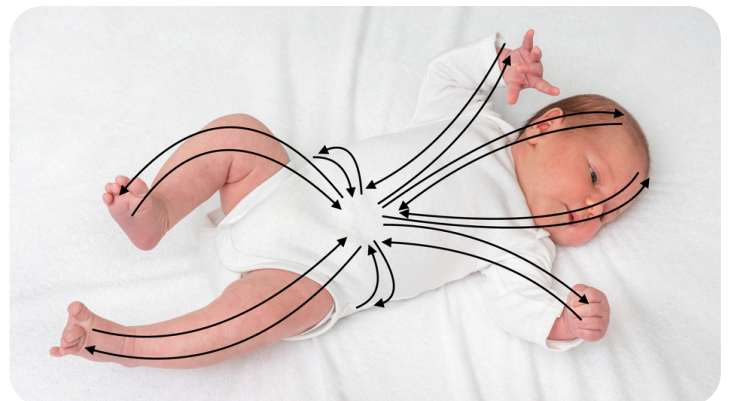
Leg & foot massage can be done at every nappy change or bath time

## Massage Integration

This activity bring awareness to your baby of their extremities - head, arms, legs and tail, in relation to their centre. Some call it 'naval radiation' or you can think of it like a starfish.

During part of this routine you will keep one hand on your baby's tummy (take care of the umbilical cord by cupping your hand), you can alternate hands as you need. Each move starts and finishes at the tummy. This can be done over clothes and either after the leg & foot massage or at a different time. Your baby can be lying on the floor or your lap.

- Place both hands on their tummy and chest, stroke up either side of their face to the top of their head with both hands, gently squeeze and return back to their tummy.
- Stroke out and down their right arm, gently squeeze their hand and fingers, return to their tummy. Repeat on left arm.
- Stroke out and down their right leg, gently squeeze their foot and toes, return to their tummy. Repeat on left.
- Combine same side arms and legs. Stroke out the right arm then down to the right foot. Repeat on the left. Remember the squeeze.
- Combine opposite side arms and legs. Stroke out the right arm and down to the left foot, then left arm and right foot, returning to the tummy.
- Finish with both hands curling around their waist, fingers reaching down to their tail bone, then sweep back to tummy.



## Movement - In Your Arms

Carrying, holding and rocking your baby in your arms is by far the best way to continue to develop their vestibular system, it also makes them feel secure. Make sure you support their head in these early days. Carrying, holding and rocking your baby in your arms is by far the best way to continue to develop their vestibular system, it also makes them feel secure.

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The more you carry them in your arms the more confident you will become and this will help you adapt your holds during casting and bracing. Your baby will also enjoy being in your arms to smell you, see you and feel you.

- Sitting or standing, the face-to-face hold (top right) is a great way to interact with your baby whilst providing stimulation for their feet against your stomach.
- The belly hold (bottom right) is a great one to calm a fussy baby as you can also place a hand on their back to rub or pat.



With both of these holds you can provide stimulation to their feet, stretch their legs or allow them to kick freely.

## Floor-time - Active and Passive

The floor is your baby's best friend - believe it or not. It creates and provides the opportunity that they need to continue developing, it is a really important time for their hind brain to finish training them with their foundational movements and integrate the reflexes. Their brain is like their personal trainer coaching them, telling them what to do (involuntary) until they have learnt enough to take over their body themselves (voluntary) to reach for object and start moving themselves etc. Your baby has a huge journey ahead of them to get from lying on the floor to upright on their feet, so the more time on the floor the better. Casting and bracing should not affect development, in fact the more time your baby has preparing to walk the better. So many parents are in a rush to see their baby walk, crucial milestones can be skipped or fast-forwarded. So take a moment and know that your baby will walk in their own time.

### Active floor movements

Place your baby on the floor (in a safe place) for short periods during the day - on their back, and once their umbilical has healed start on their tummy. First on your chest, legs then floor. Observe their free movements.

- Place large objects (like yourself) either side for them to look at and practice focusing.
- Use your hands against their legs, let them reach out to them and push against them (mimicking the wall of the womb)



### Passive floor movements (you move them)

- Place your baby on the floor or your lap, do the following movement - gently and without force.
- Cross their legs both ways, cross their arms both ways (right over left and vice versa).
- Touch left arm to right foot and vice versa.
- Reach their arms above their head, or out like a starfish.
- Bend their knees to their chest then straighten their legs (as much as they will let you).