

Feel-Good Moves for Moms

Soothe parenting pains and avoid future aches with these simple exercises.

BY RACHEL RABKIN PECHMAN

After a year of carrying my baby on my hip, all it took was bending to get milk from the fridge to throw my back out. As I recovered on the couch, I realized then that to keep up with a kid you need to protect your body. Brooke Siler, owner of Re:ab Pilates, in New York City, designed this series of stretches for rehabbing common Mommy strains. Do it three to seven times a week until you're healed (check with your doc if you've suffered a significant injury). And to ward off future problems, Siler also offers a roundup of strength moves (aim to do each three times a week—or even daily).



Don't you wish you could reach your toes this easily?

TIP

It's always best to carry your child in front of you with two arms. If you need a free hand, move her slightly toward the side.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Carrying your baby on one hip

WHAT HURTS Side muscles

SOOTHING MOVE

Lengthen and stretch side muscles: Kneel on ground. If you carry your baby on right side, stretch right arm over head, so right bicep is near ear; lean toward left side, inhaling. Exhale; straighten back up to lengthen right side. For added stretch, hold light weight in right hand. Do 5 times. Repeat 5 times on other side, then come back to initial (tighter) side for 3 more reps.



PREVENTION POINTER

To strengthen both sides of your body, use your baby as an exercise weight. Stand with feet turned out, wider than shoulder-width apart, and knees in a semi-squat. Holding your child slightly in front of you with elbows bent, twist from side to side for one rep, taking deep breaths. Do 3 sets of 5 reps with abs engaged and knees stationary; straighten legs between each set.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Lifting your kid onto playground equipment

WHAT HURTS Back and shoulders



SOOTHING MOVE Alleviate back and shoulder pain while tightening core by lying on back with knees bent, feet on floor, and heels together. Reach arms overhead, squeeze inner thighs together, and engage abs. Bring arms forward; inhale and roll torso up. Exhale, reaching arms over knees, stretching back and shoulders, and pulling abs in tighter. Inhale, rolling back down to mat; exhale, stretching arms overhead. Repeat 10 times.

TIP
When lifting a child, engage abs, bend knees, shift weight to heels, and lift by pushing into the ground.



PREVENTION POINTER Strengthen lifting muscles by placing two 5-pound weights in front of you, shoulder-width apart. Squat with abs tight and back straight; pick up a weight in each hand. Push off ground with feet (as if going to jump) to standing position, with weights at sides. Keeping elbows in, curl weights to shoulders, then push them overhead. Reverse movements, bringing weights to floor. Do 3 sets of 10.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Hunching to one side to hold your child's hand

WHAT HURTS Side and upper back



SOOTHING MOVE

To stretch your side muscles, sit on right buttock with knees bent and feet curled up to the left near butt. Hold outside of ankles with left hand. Inhale, lifting right arm toward ceiling, then exhale, bending body toward left, stretching arm overhead, and looking down toward ankles. Inhale and rise up. Switch arms, placing right palm on floor and sliding it away from body; bend arm so right elbow is 1 inch off floor. Stretch left arm overhead; exhale, looking down toward right hand. Inhale and rise back up, pushing off right palm. Bending left then right counts as one set. Do 3 sets; repeat exercise on other side.

TIP
Can't reach your child's hand when standing tall? Hold onto one end of a short rope and have him hold the other.



PREVENTION POINTER To strengthen back, lie on stomach with limbs outstretched. Engage abs and raise left arm and right leg off floor. Hold; lift head and chest off ground. With head and chest steady, switch so right arm and left leg are off floor. Keeping head up, abs engaged, and limbs straight, continue switching arms and legs in a swimming motion (move quickly while still controlling the movement) as you inhale for 5 counts and exhale for 5 counts. Do 3 times.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Straining to stuff your resistant toddler into a stroller or car seat

WHAT HURTS Upper and lower back

TIP
When fastening a child in, bend knees and engage abs to relieve pressure from back and shift weight onto legs.



SOOTHING MOVE Lie on your stomach, then prop yourself up on your elbows, so chest is lifted. Keeping legs together, push your pubic bone into the floor; bend right knee and kick foot as close as you can to your bottom twice. Lower right leg; repeat with left leg. Do 10 times each leg.

PREVENTION POINTER Do lunges to strengthen legs and butt, which should bear strain of this chore. Stand with feet together; take giant step with left foot, so knee is over ankle, right knee is close to ground. Push up with right leg to return to start position. Repeat on right leg. Alternate legs for 20 steps.

TIP
Sit up straight while nursing and prop the baby with pillows to bring her up to your breast.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Slouching while breastfeeding

WHAT HURTS Neck and upper back

SOOTHING MOVE

Stretch your back by creating space between your vertebrae: Stand with shoulders and back against a wall, with abs pulled in and up. Keep heels together, toes several inches apart. Roll head forward slowly until mid and upper back no longer touch wall; relax upper body and allow arms to follow natural movement of stretch. Hold for 3 counts; slowly roll back up. Do 5 times.



PREVENTION POINTER

Strengthen your postural muscles by standing with your shoulders and back against a wall and your core muscles engaged. With your feet hip-width apart, walk them out about a foot from wall. Inhaling, slide down wall so knees bend slightly; hold your breath for 3 counts. Slide up to start position as you exhale. Repeat 9 times. □

