



## **Physical Therapists Advise How to Pick Up, Bend Down, and Lift Babies and Toddlers Without Pain or Strain**

### **Posture Tips for Mom / Postural Techniques for Life's Everyday Tasks**

For any mother or caregiver who has stopped counting how many times she daily lifts, bends down, or carries her children and their assorted paraphernalia, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) offers a Mother's Day card that features proper postural techniques to accomplish these daily feats without aches and pains.

Kendra Harrington, PT, MS, pelvic floor physical therapist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, and an APTA member, says mothers can avoid muscular strains to the neck, back, and leg muscles by adjusting the way they go about their daily tasks. "It may be as simple as remembering to do a 'half-kneel lift' when picking up your child or holding him close to your chest when you carry him," says Harrington. "If moms remember these simple tips, they'll be sure to feel the difference, as well as see the changes in their posture." Harrington offers a special message to mothers-to-be, suggesting that they focus on arm and abdominal strengthening, such as crunches and Pilates-based, core stability exercises, even before getting pregnant. "Repetitive squatting, bending, and pushing go hand-in-hand with motherhood, and those moms who are physically well-prepared for it, will have a much easier time with these daily physical requirements," says Harrington.

In her book for new parents, *How to Raise Children Without Breaking Your Back*, Holly Herman, PT, MS, OCS, recommends a simple exercise to help improve back posture: Stand up straight with your back against a wall, making sure that your heels, buttocks, upper back, head, and arms are touching the wall. Slowly raise your arms along the wall, going as high as you can while still keeping your elbows and shoulders touching the wall. This exercise will help strengthen the muscles in the upper back, Herman says.

### **Special Considerations for Older Moms**

"It is particularly important for new mothers who are 40 years of age and older to be fit before pregnancy," echoes physical therapist Jennifer M Bottomley, PT, PhD, an independent consultant based in West Roxbury, Mass, and president of APTA's Section on Geriatrics. "Because of the changes in hormonal concentration that accompanies pregnancy, laxity in ligaments and joints occur, so older prospective mothers tend to develop musculoskeletal injuries more often than their younger counterparts. That's why it is crucial that they follow a workout program featuring extension and postural exercises during pregnancy," she notes.

### **Grandparents As Caregivers**

With more grandparents taking an active role in raising their grandchildren, Bottomley has developed an exercise regimen aimed specifically at this target audience. At "The GrandParenting Exercising Program," based in Concord, Mass, men and women — ranging in ages from late 50s to early 90s — are taught how to increase strength and flexibility, cardiovascular exercises, and proper nutrition and hydration. "As more grandparents play an integral role in their grandchildren's upbringing, it has become increasingly important to

educate them on how best to get physically stronger in order to prevent injury," says Bottomley.

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