

Article

Coping with your baby when you have RA

NRAS Member Helen Arnold gives some handy tips based on personal experience as a mother with RA.

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For mothers and fathers with bad hands, my top tips would be:

- Once babies can hold their heads up, it gets a bit easier (you don't need to constantly put your hand under their head).
- Once babies can be carried on your hip, it gets a bit easier (you can use your forearms, not your hands).
- Make sure you have an armchair next to the baby's bed, so you don't have to carry him/her far during the night when they wake.
- Try to pick baby up in stages: take your time, i.e. lift forward, put forearm behind neck to take some weight, then hand under bottom. Over time, you develop a knack.
- Find a good carrying sling, there are loads of types around. If you have a bad neck or shoulders, I would recommend the belt with a step on it, which is great once baby is old enough to carry on your hip.
- Try to do everything at waist level, i.e. put baby's bouncy seat on a tabletop (secure it or tie it to the wall for safety), put baby on the sofa (you can get a special "bed" bar in Mothercare which slides under the sofa cushions and creates a barrier to stop baby from slipping sideways) or buy a rocker for your Moses basket to raise its height.
- Personally, I wouldn't recommend bending down and stressing hands and wrists by bathing baby – get someone else to help! If you have to bath baby in the bath, use a bathing sling to support his weight. I found it easier to use a plastic baby bath on the kitchen table, which I filled with jugs of warm water and from the kettle. Sometimes I even used my Mum and Dad's really large kitchen sink!!!
- Add castors under furniture you need to move a lot.
- Buy a good breastfeeding support (you can get ones that fit round your waist), even if you aren't breastfeeding it's easier to hold baby up close while sitting comfortably, with him raised effortlessly to chest level.
- Buy a lightweight pram, which is easy to fold up. Make sure it has good storage space and handles on the back that you can hang things from, so you don't have to carry heavy shopping bags as well as pushing the pram.
- Steer clear of bodysuits with poppers underneath (unless your fingers are okay). Zippers or velcro are better. Or, some French baby clothes have flaps at the back and don't need popping. Petit Bateau is good but expensive.
- Try and get hold of a drop-sided cot. They aren't the standard type of cot these days, so you will need to have a good browse on the internet to track one down. It's much easier to be able to lower one side of the cot than to lean in really low to pick up baby. If you can't get hold of, or afford a drop-sided cot, get an ordinary one. But make sure it has fittings which allow you to raise the mattress up high in the cot's frame while baby is small, then lower it in stages as he grows.