

BabyGym® calming and suckling exercises for a distraught baby

Lyn Wade

I am a Registered Nurse, Midwife and BabyGym Instructor and have run my own Well Baby Clinic in Pietermaritzburg for many years. I often get called to help New Moms with various issues particularly with breastfeeding and I had a lovely experience recently that I would like to share with you.

I received a desperate SMS from a new Mom (with a 4 day old C-section baby) quite late on a Sunday night with regards to her breast feeding. Mom had arrived home from hospital on Saturday afternoon, feeding had been going fairly well in hospital but now that baby was home things had gone a little 'pear shaped'. I received a tearful call from Mom Monday morning at 7am saying that her baby had not fed and had been screaming since 11pm Sunday night and could I please come and help. I arrived at this mom's house to find Mom and baby very distraught, the grandparents had arrived earlier to also try and help with the situation.

Before taking the baby from mom I explained to the family what I was going to do and the importance of 'sameness soothes' i.e. mimicking how this little baby felt whilst still in utero.

Mommy was very happy to hand over this very unhappy soul. I held this tiny baby fairly tight against my chest in the foetal position, with her head tucked under my chin and I gently rocked her from side to side and hummed to her and she started to calm down. I then lay her on my lap (which started her crying again), so I followed the BabyGym guidelines to calm a baby: I bent her legs up against my tummy, cradled her head in my hand and with my other hand did the Vagus nerve rub under her left clavical. I did the sternal tap while I softly made the 'shooshing' sounds. Within moments this precious Little Girl calmed down and completely relaxed.

Mom then put her to the breast. Baby was so relaxed and her breathing was more regular, but she made no attempt to suckle so we did the BabyGym exercises to stimulate suckling. I asked mom to use her thumb and apply pressure to the palm of baby's hand, this little girl latched on and immediately started to suckle. Once she was latched I suggested to Mom to simulate contractions around the crown of baby's head, this is an exercise especially beneficial to C-section babies who missed out on the contractions around the crown during the natural birth process. The mothers face was a complete picture, such a joy to witness! She couldn't believe how strong this little ones suck suddenly had become and she suckled and fed beautifully. By doing the simple but necessary BabyGym exercises this little baby girl was able to relax and get her suck, swallow breath in a rhythm and have a peaceful feed.

I had all my faith that what we have learnt in BabyGym would work but I was really disappointed that I didn't have a video camera ready to capture this most amazing experience and more so the expression of complete surprise and utter delight on this once stressed out mom's face as this little baby fed.

The Vagus nerve lies just beneath the left clavical. It supplies the mouth, heart, lungs and digestive system. By rubbing the Vagus nerve calms the little one down which makes suckling more rhythmical in a suck swallow breath pattern preventing colic and reflux.





The hand and the mouth are on the same neurological pathway to the brain and therefore, when Mom massages the palm of baby's hand suckling is stimulated.

Rhythmically massaging the crown of baby's head mimics what baby would have felt coming through the birth canal with each contraction. This crown massage stimulates the sucking reflex.



- De Jager, M. 2011. Brain development MILESTONES and learning. Johannesburg: Mind Moves Institute
De Jager, M. 2009. BabyGym- brain and body gym for babies. Welgemoed: Metz Press
De Jager, M. BabyGym Instructors Website, BabyGym 1 Tutorial 3
De Jager, M. BabyGym Instructors Website, BabyGym 1 Tutorial 4