

The Physical Toll of Carrying Toddlers

When you become a child care provider, nobody tells you how hard it will be – especially on your wrists, elbows, back and neck. All the lifting, bending and twisting to get kids in and out of strollers, cribs and car seats takes a physical toll in the form of creaky knees, achy elbows and a rebellious back.

Luckily, having good posture and learning how to lift and carry your child properly can reduce your risk of injury. With that in mind, national experts flag five body-breaking moves and how to fix them.

Carrying a toddler

Don't: Balance your child on one hip. This can strain your back and the ligaments on that side of the body. In addition, as your arm presses against your child, your muscles continually contract, reducing blood flow. Over time, this can lead to trauma of the tissues in your arms and shoulders.

Do: Hold her in front of you with her legs wrapped around your waist. Keeping your child centered will help you stand upright – your spine's natural position. Another option: Use a stroller (or encourage your child to walk) as often as possible.

Putting your toddler on your lap

Don't: Lean forward while you remain seated. Why? As you lift, the pressure on your spinal discs multiplies to three to ten times the weight of your child. If you're tall, for example, lifting a 20-pound toddler from the floor could put as much as 200 pounds of pressure on your back!

Do: Get down on one knee with the other foot planted in front of you, and hold her as you move back into your seat. Or, your child climbs into your lap.

Lifting a toddler from a car seat

Don't: Twist your body to pick up the child. With both your feet on the ground, you twist and lean into the car seat with your arms extended, your toddler at the end of them. Lifting your toddler that way can do a number on your knees, lower back, neck, shoulder, elbows and wrists.

Do: Put one leg into the car and face the car seat as you're putting your child in it. You'll take pressure off your back. If your car seat is in the middle of the back seat, climb in and face the car seat as you lift your child into it.

Of course, positioning yourself properly can take a few extra seconds you don't always have with a feisty toddler in tow. Still, it doesn't have to be perfect all the time. But the more often you lift correctly, the better you're able to tolerate it when you don't.