

# Baby Ball - Every Baby Benefits

Lenore Grubinger



## What Is Baby Ball?

From the beginning, your baby benefits when you hold them in a balled-up position, with their knees to their nose, face bent toward their body, and hands near each other. This gentle flexion\* of Baby's whole body is an essential tool for Baby and you. This contained comfort helps Baby regulate. I call this Baby Ball.

Baby Ball is Baby's physical and neurological "home base." It's part of their bond with you. It reiterates the firm containment they felt in the womb, yet is more flexible. During Baby Ball connection is enhanced as parent and Baby flex toward one another. This is a natural response that I call the Flexion-to-flexion reflex (see more below).

This position isn't about perfection. There's no exact, correct way to practice Baby Ball. Rather, it's a way to interact and care for your baby. It's one beneficial thing to do among many. It helps Baby activate their full body flexion reflexes. It helps them regulate first with their grown-up(s) and then with themselves.

\*Flexion is a bending movement around a joint.

# 8 Essential Benefits Of Baby Ball

## **Bonding**

Baby Ball feeds the bond between baby and parent that opens the pathways of receiving, and strengthens baby's ability to be comforted. Enjoying Baby Ball is part of being able to be comforted. It's the physical expression of the loving protective emotions we feel about our babies and those we care for.

## **Digestion**

Baby Ball is the most natural, non-invasive way to soothe digestive discomfort. It can be curative for gas, reflux, constipation, colic. Stress can direct Baby's digestion up and out (reflux, vomiting). Baby Ball gives the flexion that helps strengthen the in-and-down function of Baby's digestion. In-and-down digestion is the best foundation for Baby's sleep. Babies suffering from digestive discomfort have more arching than flexing. It's a paradox that the stressed baby arches more yet needs more flexion to regulate the digestive tube. Sometimes parents lose confidence to practice Baby Ball when Baby frequently arches. Try very small and frequent doses.

## **Reflex Development**

Reflexes are our unconscious hardwiring for movement. They are "experience expectant." This means they require positions in gravity and sensations of all kinds to activate. Even the healthiest of babies typically need help accessing their reflex potential. Baby Ball is central to this, as it flexes the third Lumbar vertebra (mid back). This makes TummyTime easier. Both of these are necessary for over 50 percent of our human reflex responses.

## **Flexion-to-flexion Reflex**

When we explore Baby Ball with Baby, we engage what I've named the Flexion-to-flexion reflex. This is a relational reflex. It feels good to Baby and caretaker. Flexion-to-flexion is a natural, mutually restorative reflex, regulating both their nervous systems (their interbrain). It is embodied bonding.

## **TummyTime and Rolling**

When Baby is placed from Baby Ball to TummyTime, they tend to tolerate the position more readily, resting and playing without upset. This typically leads to rolling, which is the next developmental milestone. Without Baby Ball, babies often develop intense thrusting of their legs. This makes it harder for them to develop arm strength, which makes TummyTime uncomfortable. Baby Ball leads to happy early Tummy Time, which leads to easy early rolling, which leads to belly crawling and hands-and-knees crawling. These are all best for Baby's brain and body.

## **Symmetry**

Baby Ball is a natural way to help your baby feel and use both body halves with more symmetry. It's especially helpful if your baby was uncomfortably positioned in utero - or if one limb was positioned differently than the other - turned, twisted, or restricted asymmetrically. None of us are exactly symmetrical in our shape or movement. Reflexes are part of nature's plan to help us be symmetrical. Baby Ball supports this, opening our reflexes on both sides of our body from the beginning. This is good for our health, from our bones and muscles to our senses and brain functions.

## **Compression**

Compression from the adult is intrinsic to Baby Ball. Compression can convey love and care. And it tones Baby's digestive tube. Everybody needs it and Baby needs lots and lots of it. Compression is a natural component of bonding. It's also foundational to self-regulation.

## **Midline Organization**

Midline is a place, not a body part. It's along the spine in front of the body, not in it. Our sense of midline influences how we organize our attention and action. It also supports symmetry. It's a hub of coordinated energy and skills. Crossing midline in movement as a baby is foundational for later complex brain activity. Baby Ball helps Baby orient to midline, as it brings all Baby's limbs together in front of their body.



**Baby ball on your lap**

## **How To Practice Baby Ball**

Prepare to hold Baby in a ball shape in your arms. Have one of your arms behind Baby's shoulders, neck, and head; the other arm is under their knees, legs bent.

Bring Baby's knees toward their belly until their back is in a C-curve. Bring their head in line with their spine or bent just slightly forward (nose to chest), rather than with their neck bent back.

They may arch their back and thrust both their legs out - or just one leg or the other. This is fine. Let Baby arch their back and fully extend their legs and their body whenever they want! Then, bring them back to Baby Ball. Baby Ball is a living, breathing, fluid moment in time.

Wait while Baby extends: maintain your arms under their head and knees as they arch. Arching is a cyclical position. It's strong and then diminishes. If you wait, Baby will soften - even if only a little and briefly. Observe this cycle. Then, during this softening phase, bring Baby more into a ball with their knees toward their nose. Hold Baby in this position gently and firmly. Hold steadily here until Baby is done. Refrain from jiggling Baby's legs in and out! When they start to thrust again let them move.

There is no urgency: do not force Baby. When Baby arches, parent then restores flexion at the end of the arch cycle without forcing. The more you hold them with their knees to their belly, the easier they will find it to be in this position. If Baby's legs don't soften, come back to Baby Ball later. Every rest in Baby Ball - no matter how brief - helps engage Baby's flexion reflexes.

## **When To Practice Baby Ball**

Practice Baby Ball when Baby is in your arms, when nursing, on your shoulder, and in your lap. Also practice Baby Ball when passing Baby from one grownup to another (see "Please pass the Baby Ball" in [On The Way To Walking](#)). At first Baby Ball might feel awkward. Yet, it quickly becomes second nature to both of you.

## **Stress And Baby Ball**

Generally babies thrust their legs a lot. With stress, babies thrust even more strongly and more often. These babies need help activating their folding-in, flexion reflexes. This is because reflexes work in pairs to balance the left and the right, the top and the bottom, the front and the back of the body. Reflexes work in pairs. This is part of nature's plan for balance. Stress activates the reflexes on the back of the body, making extension more dominant than flexion.

It's necessary to let Baby thrust to their fullest before trying to bring knees to nose. This will be a dialogue with Baby's responses, not a static position to maintain. It's a movement dance. The dance of Baby Ball involves waiting for the softening in baby's thrusting to initiate flexion of their legs. Don't force.

Sometimes Baby Ball or Flexion-to-flexion are hard to find or sustain. This is part of the natural cycle of regulation, dis-regulation, and re-regulation. If you need to, let it go. Come back later. Connecting is more important than Baby Ball.

## **Note For Parents**

Please remember that Baby Ball isn't a "better" position or a thing you "should" do.

It was and still is my hope, that if parents take away nothing else, they'll know that Baby likes and benefits from being held in a ball, and grown ups need to help her find this position sometimes.

Parents, do seek a natural movement lesson if your baby has digestive distress and you're unable to work together to find moments of rest in Baby Ball. You and your baby need it and deserve it. It will make everything easier.

**I coined the term "Baby Ball" in 2000 when working with Catherine Burns in the Developmental Movement and Learning project. This term became part of the Infant Developmental Movement Education program of The School for Body Mind Centering™.**



## **Baby Ball - It Goes On...**

Baby Ball is not just for babies! As one parent says, "just squish 'em!"

Find the moments in your family life for Toddler Ball, Child Ball, Big-Kid Ball, and Biggest-kid-of-all Ball (that's us, Grownups!). We continue Baby Ball naturally when we *spoon* a dear one or let ourselves be spooned. We also self comfort and recuperate, lying on our side, bringing our nose and our knees toward our belly, and allowing our mind to rest. That's self healing with Baby Ball.

For more on Baby Ball and all aspects of Baby's Natural Movement Development™ see my book, [On The Way To Walking, The Essential Guide To Natural Movement Development™](#).

For more on reflexes see my chart, [Neurodevelopmental Movement Patterns & The Central Nervous System](#).