



THE BENEFITS OF BABY MASSAGE

It is now well documented that baby massage can play a vital role in aiding relaxation, digestion and to promote bonding. Research has also found massage to be a valuable tool in encouraging weight gain, particularly for the premature baby. Supervised massage is an ideal way for older siblings to bond with a new baby and is a great way to get Dad involved in caring for his newborn. For toddlers who seem unable to lie still, massage time can also be used as 'sharing' time or story time and provide an opportunity for quiet and gentle communication. The long, rhythmic and fluid strokes of massage can be instrumental in helping even older children prepare for slumber and are definitely nurturing and soothing to us all.

Some parents, however, fail to understand the importance of the actual product they use to massage their baby. For a newborn or very young infant, a good choice may be a cold pressed, preferably organic natural oil which is petro-chemical free. Oils such as sweet almond or jojoba are ideal but offer little nourishment to the skin alone. A pre-blended product that is Aroma-Free™ (no essential oils or added fragrance) and contains a simple mix of cold pressed, naturally nourishing oils such as calendula or evening primrose oils may provide additional benefits to dry, sensitive skin. These types of oils are rich in natural fatty acids and vitamins and can help to moisture dry skin whilst providing a medium for gentle, fluid movement.

TIPS TO CONSIDER PRIOR TO BABY MASSAGE

- * Prior to massage, take time out for yourself, take a few deep breaths, and ensure you are totally relaxed and prepared to spend some quality time with your child.
- * Always ensure you massage in a warm environment - an infants body temperature can drop dramatically when undressed, so keep a towel/blanket or spare clothes close by for draping over the parts of the body not being massaged.
- * Take care when handling Baby as freshly massage infants can be extremely slippery.
- * Avoid any harsh lights (including sunlight) that may be too bright for the infant to look into whilst lying down. A room which is dimly lit or filled with gentle sunlight is ideal.
- * Massage with Baby placed on a bed or thick blanket/duonah on the floor, taking care of your posture (kneel down if massaging on a bed) or lay Baby on your legs (head at your knees and their bottom in your lap) leaning against a wall or lounge with your knees bent up.
- * If you listened to some particularly soothing music whilst pregnant, you may like to play this softly. It is very reassuring for Baby to hear your voice whilst being massaged to hum, speak softly or sing to your Baby during this special time as you caress and stroke them.
- * Short, clean fingernails are essential and remove any jewelery or rings that may interfere.
- * If you have long hair, tie it back and roll up any long sleeves.
- * Ensure you keep one hand in contact with Baby's skin at all times - this will help with the flow of energy between you and your child and allows Baby to look around and take in their surroundings without having to keep checking that you are still there.
- * Avoid massaging over wounds, surgery or cuts or recent scar tissue. It is not recommended to massage an infant who has a fever or a contagious disease or you may encourage it to spread.

* Take care not to massage on Baby's abdomen immediately following a feed or when he/she has the hiccups. Massage of other areas during this time is fine.

* Do not massage a newborn infant at bath time as this can be over-stimulating. If your infant is older than four months, and you wish to massage at bath time, it is best to massage after the bath to allow the oils to be absorbed by the skin.

* Never watch the clock during massage you will know when either you, or more importantly your baby has had enough. Infant massage is beneficial to both you and your baby so take the telephone off the hook and enjoy!

10 STEPS TO BASIC INFANT MASSAGE

1. Always start at the legs for newborns, as this is least intrusive area. Begin by holding Baby's right foot in your left hand, gently stroking up the leg with your right hand, from the outside of the ankle, up over the knee and to the inner thigh, then sweeping down to the inside ankle. Repeat each stroke 2-3 times.

2. Using both hands, apply a gentle 'wringing' action, squeezing up and down the length of the leg, finishing at the ankle.

3. Use your thumb to lightly circle the soles of the feet, gently squeezing and releasing Baby's toes one by one. Gently move one hand off Baby's leg and onto the other leg, then move your second hand over so as not to break the flow of fluid movement. Continue to massage Baby's other leg using strokes explained in Steps 1-3.

4. Move up toward the tummy area and make contact with this new 'space' so Baby becomes familiar with the area to be massaged next. This is an ideal time to introduce circle shapes and shapes of letters, even spelling out words on the skin, making the massage more enjoyable particularly for the older child. Be sure to maintain eye contact as you explain the shape or word you are making to your child. Keep in mind strokes should be in a clockwise direction and should be confined to the abdomen only. Massage Baby's tummy from YOUR left to right, (clockwise) in the direction of their digestive tract, using small circles with fingertips or the flat of your hand and taking care to avoid the umbilical cord area.

5. Complete the front by placing both hands in the centre of Baby's chest and sweep up and out over the centre of the chest, over the shoulders and hugging the entire length of the arms finishing off at the fingertips. Using both hands massage Baby's arms using a gentle squeezing up and down, finishing off at the fingertips. Massage each finger from knuckle to tip but do not attempt to restrain your baby if he/she curls fingers, kicks or moves arms during any part of the massage.

6. Gently turn Baby over and use the whole hand to stroke from the shoulders, down Baby's back to the buttocks - take care of Baby's delicate spinal area and instead always work either side of the spine.

7. Use both thumbs to make small circles around the top of the buttocks using both hands, starting toward the middle and moving out to the sides. Gently knead or 'roll' the buttocks simultaneously with both hands using a press and release action.

8. Move onto the back of Baby's legs and use a gentle wring and release action starting at the top of one leg, massaging from the thigh all the way down the back of the leg and onto the soles of the foot. Move hands one at a time gently onto the second leg and repeat these movements.

9. Using long, light and fluid strokes from the head to Baby's toes, finish off the back area.

10. Carefully turn your baby over and stroke across the forehead using fingertips of both hands. Starting in the middle and gliding out toward Baby's temples. Pause for a moment and use feather-light circles around the temple area. Do not massage near the eye/eyelids and take care not to get oil near Baby's eye area.

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