

Infant Massage



Note: This information is intended for educational purposes only. You should seek further advice and instruction from your chosen healthcare professional.

Enhancing your bond with baby through touch

"Being touched and caressed, being massaged, is food for the infant. Food as necessary as minerals, vitamins and proteins." (DR.FREDERICK LEBOYER)

Touch is a universal language. It's also a great way to communicate with your baby. Did you know that in-utero babies can hear, smell, see, feel and establish bonds that last forever? You can maintain these bonds after birth through the infant massage.

The basic bonding and therapeutic benefits derived from this practice are not recent discoveries. Many cultures throughout history have engaged in this activity to bring balance, health and wellbeing to their child. Stimulation that begins in the womb

Human embryos from approximately eight weeks of age are caressed in the womb as the amniotic fluid sways with movement. This in turn stimulates the skin. Stimulation continues throughout the pregnancy as the embryo develops and the womb closes in around the baby.

Baby experiences gentle contractions that massage the skin. The gentle caresses or contractions of the womb become much stronger as the birthing process begins.

Baby becomes accustomed to feeling the rhythms and it is important that these are re-established after birth to continue the therapeutic and bonding benefits of skin stimulation. This is why your baby requires constant movement and tactile stimulation.

Babies command you to pick them up. It is their way of making sure they receive the touch (skin stimulation) they need for therapeutic as well bonding benefits.

Benefits for Babies and Children

"People don't realise that communication for a baby, and the first language of its development, is through the skin. If only most people had realised this they would have all along given babies the kind of skin stimulation they require." (ASHLEY MONTAGUE, Anthropologist)

Massage is so good for babies, parents and caregivers. And it's fun for everyone! For babies, massage helps tone the digestive, respiratory and nervous systems, helping to reduce the incidence of colic, asthma and skin disorders. Massage also reinforces the bonding process, reduces stress for both the giver and receiver, and promotes a positive and nurturing environment.

Relief - massage can relieve discomfort from teething, congestion, gas colic and emotional stress.

Bonding - more intimate interaction with parent helping to foster the parent/infant bond

Skin Stimulation - All the physiological systems are stimulated by massage. Babies are not born with the protective insulation sheaf that protects nerves and so massage helps to speed up the myelinisation of the brain/nervous system.

<i>Infant Massage Helps:</i>
<i>Increase oxygen and nutrient flow to cells</i>
<i>To deepen respiration</i>
<i>Improve muscle tone and circulation</i>
<i>Encourage midline orientation</i>
<i>Improve sensory awareness</i>
<i>Baby/child to sleep deeper and longer</i>
<i>Improve digestion</i>
<i>Enhance neurological development</i>
<i>Provide special communication time that serves as a safe time for children to confide in their parent</i>

Provide special communication time that serves as a safe time for children to confide in their parent

Benefits for Parents and Caregivers

One of the most wonderful gifts you can give your child is massage. Equally, there is immense satisfaction and joy felt by parents and caregivers alike when they engage in the practice of infant massage. Massage helps babies and care givers to interact. It is something you do with, not simply for your baby. The process of massage promotes trust, relationships and respect.

- A feeling of being more capable and hence a sense of confidence in being a parent.
- The opportunity to bond with your child eases the concerns of working parents who are not with their child during the day.
- Baby's daily massage time offers parent a time to relax and unwind from the busy pace of life.
- When a child is distressed, massage may help the child to relax.
- Assist to improve 'communication' between parent and child.
- Provides a special time for father and child.
- It's fun and rewarding for parents and caregivers.

Recommended reading:

Infant Massage — A Handbook for Loving Parents, by Vimala Schneider-McClure. Published by Bantam

Example of Baby Massage

Touch is a universal language. Massaging your baby makes them feel safe and secure and bonding is reinforced. Only massage as much as your baby's stimulation threshold will allow. If you notice your baby is curling up, trying to move away, or withdrawing - these are signs that your baby has had enough. Make sure you are relaxed first as baby will pick up on your emotions. Gradually build up to whole body massage. First, lie your baby on their back and ask them if they would like to receive their massage. This instills respect for their own body. By watching your baby's body language, you can see whether they would like to or not.

Read the signs

That is, if arms are tight across the body then the answer is no. If arms are floppy then the answer is yes. If your baby is grimacing or crying then the answer is no. If your baby is laughing then the answer is yes. Undress and maintain touch by placing the back of your hand on their tummy. Pour a little Essenture Baby Massage Oil with your other hand and start with the legs (the least vulnerable and the least obtrusive).

Start with the legs

Massage each leg in turn by making a "C" shape with your hand and from hip to foot use gentle but firm strokes downwards, one hand after the other. Repeat each stroke 3 times - support the ankle. Then with your thumbs walk up the sole of the foot and very gently squeeze each toe.

Onto the tummy

Next, move on to the tummy. Here we want to dispel wind and obstructions in the large intestine. Imagine looking at a clock on your baby's tummy. Starting at 7.00 o'clock - slide your left hand up to 10 o'clock then straight across to 2.00 o'clock down to 5 o'clock. Follow with your other hand and a sweeping upside-down "U" and say "I love you". Repeat a few times and then gently bend baby's knees into chest a couple of times.

Then to the chest

Move up to the chest. Remember if your baby has had enough or gets upset, stop. With thumbs together in the middle, take hands out to sides. Next move to the arms, use the same stroke as the legs and stroke the inside of the hands, squeeze each finger gently supporting the arm at the wrist.

Strokes to the face

Follow on to the face, small circles under the jaw and around the cheeks can be great for teething. Be careful not to get oil in their mouth or eyes, stroke down the nose and out to ears and finish with a couple of strokes on the forehead out to the side. When your baby is ready, turn them over, apply a little oil to your hands and make sweeping movements back and forth across their back. Then with one hand supporting the feet, sweep downward to their bottom.

Finish with a kiss

When you have finished, turn your baby round. Give them a kiss and thank them for letting you give them a massage. This lets them know that you respect their feelings and will leave an impression for life.

As your baby grows, use games, rhymes and songs to keep them interested.

Massage is something we do with our babies/children not simply for them. At the end of the massage, both of you will feel calmer and clearer.