A Guide to Baby Massage

Resources

Remember that any advice you find on the Internet is not meant to replace the advice of a healthcare professional.

Touch Research Institute
Department of Pediatrics
University of Miami School of Medicine
1601 NW 12th Avenue
Miami, FL 33101
Tel: 305-243-6781
http://www.miami.edu/touch-research

International Association of Infant Massage
1891 Goodyear Avenue-Suite 622
Ventura, CA 93003
Tel: 800-248-5432
http://www.iaim-us.com

International Loving Touch Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 16574
Portland, OR 97292
Tel: 503-253-8482
http://www.lovingtouch.com
Babymassage.net
http://www.babymassage.net

References

The information and techniques discussed in this pamphlet have been derived from a variety of sources including:


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Communicating With Your Baby Through Massage

Have you ever wondered what your baby is thinking or feeling? The first form of communication that you have with your child is through touch. To a baby, touching is talking. With eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin contact, the exchange of smiles, and other facial expressions, baby massage combines the important aspects of bonding between parent and child. It’s also a wonderful way for fathers, brothers, sisters and grandparents to share special time with a new addition to the family.

“What a great way to encourage mother and baby to grow closer and connect in a very loving way — to strengthen the bond between them. Massage has been shown to increase circulation, release muscle tension, which can only build and improve the immune system.”
—— Dr. Lawrence Palevsky, Continuum Center for Health and Healing/Beth Israel Hospital Baby Massage Booklet square 3/22/02 3:55 PM Page 1
In many ways, the techniques of baby massage are different from those used in adult massage. You should always pay attention to the degree of pressure you’re using—making sure that every stroke is gentle and slow. Firmer strokes can be used as your baby grows older. Especially for the first few months of massage, you should use downward strokes, which travel down your baby’s body and produce a calming effect. Often times you will only need to use one finger or part of your hand. Avoid upward strokes, which can be too stimulating. Remember that initially, not all infants will enjoy being massaged. If your baby ever seems irritable to your touch during a massage, discontinue the massage and try again at another time.

Baby massage can be done at any time during the day. Some research suggests that the best time to massage your baby is when he is awake and feeling happy. Many parents try to incorporate massage around their baby’s sleep and bath schedule. Because your baby can easily pick up on your mood and emotions, you should be feeling calm and relaxed.

Enjoying the Massage

The Benefits of Baby Massage

Baby massage has a wide range of positive benefits — from enhancing neurological development to helping your baby learn to relax. Massaged babies are better sleepers and are more alert when awake. This type of contact also develops and supports your baby’s self-esteem and lets her know she is loved.

For Your Baby

- Enhances neurological development
- Improves immune system
- Helps regulate digestive, respiratory, and circulatory systems
- Helps relieve discomfort from gas and colic, congestion and teething
- Helps baby learn to relax
- Decreases production of stress hormones
- Reduces crying and fussing
- Promotes sounder and longer sleep
- Promotes positive body image
- Improves bonding and communication

For You

- Provides a special focused time that helps deepen bonding
- Improves parent-child communication
- Helps you understand and respond to your baby’s nonverbal cues
- Promotes feelings of competence and confidence in caring for baby
- Increases your ability to help your child relax in times of stress
- Eases the stress you may feel when separated from your baby during the day
- Helps you relax and have fun with your child
Take time to gather everything you will need to have on hand, so that you can concentrate on the massage. Before you begin, always wash your hands and remove any jewelry that might interfere with your touch.

- **Temperature:** Infants tend to lose body heat when exposed to the air. The use of oil during massage will also reduce body heat. Therefore, the room should be warm enough to keep your baby calm and comfortable. The ideal room temperature is between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

- **Timing:** When you’re first starting out, allow yourself 10 to 15 minutes. A newborn might enjoy two to five minutes of massage, while a child of two months and older might enjoy a more lengthy one. Wait at least one hour between feedings to do a massage.

- **Choosing the Right Position:** Choose a position that allows you to keep your back straight, so that you will feel comfortable. Always lay your baby on a flat surface that is covered with a soft blanket or towel.

- **Using Oil:** Oil will help your hands move over your baby’s body smoothly. All-natural oil is easily absorbed by the skin and allows for smoother motions on your baby’s skin. Because oil will make your baby slippery, be extra careful when picking him up after the massage. Begin by performing a patch test to ensure that the oil does not irritate the baby’s skin or cause an allergic reaction. If irritation does occur, DO NOT use the oil. You may decide to try a different oil or massage without using any oil.

### Instructions for Patch Test

1. Place a small amount of oil on the inside of your baby’s wrist or ankle.
2. Allow 20 to 30 minutes to see if a reaction occurs. An adverse reaction would be a rash or a red inflamed area.
3. If there is no irritation, you can safely proceed with the massage. If irritation does occur, DO NOT use any oil.

**Please Note:** You should NEVER use oil on your baby’s head or face, as infants tend to put their hands in their mouths and occasionally rub their eyes. It is also very important to keep the oil out of reach from your baby. It’s a good idea to have a towel nearby to wipe off excess oil as needed.
Once you have warmed the room and have the oil and a towel ready, undress your baby and lay him down in front of you on his back, with his feet closest to you. Dip your fingers in the oil, then rub your hands together to warm it. Begin with long, gliding strokes, which allow you to spread the oil and warm the muscles. Look into his eyes, smile and talk to him, then start the massage as explained below.

**Leg and Foot Massage:**

Elevate your baby’s left leg with your right hand. Wrap your left hand around the thigh and slowly stroke toward the foot. When you reach the foot, switch hands, stroking with your left hand. After repeating several times, switch to the other leg. To massage the feet, you can press the bottom of the foot gently from the heel to the toe, using your thumbs. Knead each individual toe and make small circles around the ankle.

**Arm and Hand Massage:**

Holding one of the baby’s wrists with one hand, use your other hand to gently squeeze along the length of the arm, starting at the shoulder. When you reach your baby’s wrist, switch hands. Repeat several times. To massage your baby’s hand, use your thumb to open it if it’s clenched. Roll each finger between your forefinger and thumb. Make tiny circles around the wrist with your thumb and fingertips.

**Chest and Stomach:**

Strokes on the stomach should always be made downward and clock-wise. Place both of your hands flat, side by side, in the middle of the chest and push out to the sides gently, following the ribs. Position your hands so that they rest on either side of the baby’s torso, just above the hipbones. Keeping your hand flat, use one hand to stroke diagonally across the baby’s chest to the opposite shoulder. Cup the shoulder, and push down gently. Gently slide your hand back to its starting position. Repeat several times, then switch to the opposite shoulder.

**Face and Head:**

Start by using your fingertips to make small circles along the side of the jaws. Position your fingers on the forehead and gently stroke from the center out towards the temples. With the tips of your fingers, gently make small circles all over the head. Stay away from the soft spot (fontanel) on the head. You can circle the eyes with your thumbs, gently moving out along the eyebrows and back under the eyes.

The preceding techniques have been derived from:

Conclusion

We encourage you to participate in a baby massage class with a certified instructor to obtain individualized assistance in perfecting your technique.

This pamphlet is intended to offer you a guide to baby massage and is not intended to replace formal instruction on baby massage or advice from your child’s physician. Baby massage is not appropriate for premature or medically challenged babies. If your child has a condition or illness, you should consult your physician prior to beginning any massage.

Massaging your baby is a beautiful and loving way to begin a lifelong relationship. It can strengthen your baby’s muscles and joints and help relieve the symptoms of common childhood ailments; but most importantly, it allows you to express your love through touch and helps you establish a relationship with your child early on in life.

At Oxford, we are committed to helping you and your child achieve your optimum state of health.

Wishing you and your baby the best of health,

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Baby Massage
A Video for Loving Parents

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