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## Massage: Not Just for Mama

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### Benefits for Your Baby

- Helps your baby relax
- Stimulates circulation, digestion and neurological development
- Promotes restful sleep
- Improves your baby's immune system
- Stimulates your baby's developing nervous system
- Helps relieve pain of colic, gas, illness and teething
- Promotes healthy weight gain
- Enhances sensory awareness
- Stimulates growth-promoting hormones
- Provides baby with much-loved touch and connection
- Increases bonding and attachment between baby and parent
- Provides premature and special-needs babies with immense physiological benefits



### Benefits for Parents

- Builds your confidence in baby handling
- Enables you to become more competent in reading your baby's cues
- Gives you a special, focused time with your baby
- Deepens the bond between you and your baby
- Provides you with a tool for calming and settling your baby
- Gives parents a loving way to introduce a sibling to a new baby
- Allows you to enjoy the feel of your baby's miraculous little body

### Getting Ready for Baby's Massage

You can massage your baby at any time and in any place. Most babies love to be touched—and most parents love to touch their babies—so anytime you feel like rubbing your baby, you should. In addition to casual touches, you can also plan for a more organized massage as well. A massage is a wonderful way to end a bathing session, begin or end the bedtime ritual, or start the day. Here are some guidelines to prepare for a peaceful baby massage:

- Choose a time when you won't be interrupted or rushed.
- Make sure your baby isn't too hungry (or too full).
- If your baby is colicky, choose the time just before crying usually begins.

- Choose a warm room (at least 75°F/23.9°C) without any drafts. Depending on the temperature, you may want to keep Baby covered with a small blanket, except for the body parts that you are massaging.
- If you wish to use lotion or oils, choose products made especially for babies, when possible. Avoid nut-based oils, like peanut and almond, to avoid the risk of allergic reactions. Avoid having oils on or next to your baby's face and hands (since they will likely find their way to Baby's mouth!).
- Use warm hands when touching your baby.

Play some soft music if you and your baby would enjoy it, or use the time to talk and sing to your baby. Leave your baby in as little clothing as conditions permit—a diaper or nothing at all. (Just keep something handy to cover up that diaper area fast!) Lay your baby on a soft towel or blanket on the floor or on a bed. A small baby can lie skin-to-skin on your stomach or across your legs. Tell your baby what you are doing and ask for permission: "Would you like Mommy to give you a massage?" This sends a message from a young age that your baby's body belongs to her.

## How to Proceed

Put a bit of oil or lotion on your hands and rub them together—never pour anything directly onto your baby. Use a touch that is gentle but not so light that it tickles your baby—about the same pressure you would use on your eyelids without causing any discomfort. On small areas of your baby's body, use your fingertips; on larger areas, like his back, use the palms of your hands.

As a general rule, strokes should move from the center of your baby's body outward; for example, when massaging arms, go from shoulders out to hands. Keep your movements balanced; if you massage the left arm, then also do the right arm. If your baby is a newborn, don't massage near the umbilical cord or the circumcision site (if your baby has been circumcised). And don't forget to massage those teeny feet—a delightful experience for any parent!



Always watch your little one for signs of enjoyment (smiles, coos, relaxed posture) or dissatisfaction (turning away, fussing, closing arms, crawling away) and stop if she seems uncomfortable or restless. Vary the pressure and location of your touch, depending on your baby's reactions. Watch your baby's face and body language for feedback. If your baby is having a colic episode, then attempt to calm him with massage before judging his response to the massage. Very young babies or those who are new to massage are often uncertain about it. This is a learning experience for both of you. Sometimes babies take a few minutes to adjust, or they may like the massage at first but then have had enough and want to stop. Respect your baby's signals.

Start with a short session—no more than about five minutes. Over time, lengthen your massage sessions to 20 or 30 minutes, basing the length of time on your baby's signals of enjoyment. Don't massage your baby if she has a fever, has just had an immunization or is ill.

## What about Siblings?

Here's a wonderful experience for your older child and baby alike: Teach big brother or sister how to massage the baby. This can create a special bond between them and can promote soft and gentle touches. Massage time for your baby is often a perfect time to massage your older child, too. As your baby gets older, he'll probably want his turn at massaging his older sibling. Few things are more special for a parent than watching siblings treat each other with gentle loving care, and



this kind of ritual is perfect for encouraging sibling attachment.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*At what age should massage begin?*

You can, and should, massage a child of any age from newborn to adulthood. Children learn much about the power of gentle touch. My son David knows how wonderful a massage can be, and when he was eight years old, he gave me a nightly back massage throughout my pregnancy with his baby brother. (Yes, every night, isn't that sweet!) All of my older children love to be rubbed; there's something very special about spending a little time giving your teenager a backrub or foot massage. It maintains a beautiful parent-child connection throughout a lifetime.



*What about baby massage classes?*

Many hospitals and private organizations offer baby massage classes. These are beneficial because a certified infant massage instructor can show you all the how-tos, step by step. An instructor can give you a hands-on demonstration and answer your questions to help you feel confident in this gentle and soothing art. Remember that massage and touch are exclusively between parent and baby; the instructor will help you learn how to read your baby and use the art of massage.

## For More Information

- *The Vital Touch: How Intimate Contact with Your Baby Leads to Happier, Healthier Development* by Sharon Heller (Henry Holt, 1997)
- *Infant Massage: A Handbook For Loving Parents* by Vimala Schneider McClure (Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub, 2000)
- The International Association of Infant Massage [www.iaim-us.com](http://www.iaim-us.com)
- Touch Research Institute <http://www6.miami.edu/touch-research/>

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