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a gentle TOUCH

Baby massage
soothes wee ones

Melina Roberts, ND

A parent's *loving touch* on a baby's *delicate skin* is one of the most *valuable* things you can do for your precious little one. Research has shown the *strong connection* between baby massages and *health benefits*.

THE BENEFITS OF BABY MASSAGE

The skin-to-skin connection of an infant massage helps a baby thrive and promotes growth and development. The power of human touch is incredible. Research has shown that massages in infancy stimulate growth-promoting hormones and increase the number of enzymes that cause the cells of vital organs to be more responsive to those hormones.

According to a 2003 study published in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, babies who received massages averaged greater daily weight gains than those who didn't. In addition,

massage seems to be extremely beneficial for low birth-weight babies, who have been shown to gain weight faster and leave the hospital up to six days sooner.

One profoundly positive effect of massage in infants is the way it appears to accelerate brain development, according to a study published last year in the *Journal of Neuroscience*. Other research, such as a 2006 study in the journal *Infant Behavior and Development*, found that babies who receive massage are more relaxed, sleep better, fuss less, and cry less.

Massage for babies is also a brilliant tool for calming them down and

helping them get a good night's sleep. Not only that, but infant massage also helps develop a valuable connection between parents and their little one. Take it as an opportunity to interact with and get to know your baby better. It is important to read your baby's cues and pay attention to what she enjoys.

MASSAGE OIL

Anything that you put on your baby's skin will be absorbed into her bloodstream; therefore, you want to stay away from chemicals, fragrances, and petroleum-based products. It is best to choose edible oils such as fruit or vegetable oils,

“Encircle your hands around the ankle and do a series of thumb presses and sliding strokes along the sole of the foot.”



pure vitamin E oil, or essential oils. Cold-pressed oils are best, because they've been extracted by pressure only and not by heat or chemicals.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Choose a place that is quiet, free of interruptions, and comfortable for both of you, and a point in the day when you are not pressed for time. Lay your baby on her back on a hair dryer-warmed towel on the floor or on a change table. Keep your hands on baby at all times, especially if she is on an elevated surface.

You can place a light blanket on parts of the body that are not being massaged. Warm the oil in your hands by rubbing them together before applying to baby. Engage in eye-to-eye contact and talk or sing to your wee one. Make sure to use very gentle pressure as you delicately rub the oil into the skin.

BABY MASSAGE TECHNIQUES

Begin with the legs. Hold one foot in your hand and softly and rhythmically squeeze the leg from the ankle to the thigh. Hold the thigh with both hands and gently twist and squeeze. Roll the leg between your hands from the knee to the ankle. Encircle your hands around the ankle and do a series of thumb presses and sliding strokes

along the sole of the foot. Rub each toe. Repeat on the other leg. End the lower body portion by lightly stroking each leg from the thigh to the foot.

For the abdomen, slide both hands around baby's belly in a clockwise motion below the ribcage. Start at the lower right corner of the abdomen and move upward and across the bottom of the ribcage, then down to the lower left corner and repeat. This is a great technique for promoting good digestion and settling colicky babies. If your baby is having digestive difficulties, you can gently pump her legs into her abdomen, which helps release gas.

For the baby's chest, start at the centre and slide both hands to the sides and repeat. Do gentle circular motions on the chest and shoulders.

The arms are done in a similar fashion to the legs. Hold one of your baby's hands and softly squeeze the arm from the wrist to above the elbow with the other hand. Gently twist and squeeze the upper arm with both hands, then roll the arm between your hands. Encircle your hands around the wrist and do thumb presses and sliding strokes along the palm of the hand. Rub each finger. Hold the arm up and do smooth circular motions in the armpit to stimulate lymphatic flow. Repeat with other arm.

For the face, do light circular motions with your fingers along baby's forehead, temples, nose, and eyebrows; around the mouth and jaw; and then the ears. Do light fingertip strokes along the centre of the forehead and move outward to the temples and down along the cheeks and jaw. Avoid the soft spot on the top of the head.

Turn the baby onto her stomach and massage her back. Use the pads of your fingers and make small circular motions all over her entire back. Use your whole hand and stroke the back from the top to bottom.

BEST TIME TO GIVE A MASSAGE

The best times to give massages are before naps and before bedtime. It is good to have a routine, which will not only relax baby and prepare her for sleep, but also encourage her to associate massage with rest, which makes going to sleep so much easier.

Giving your baby a massage is an excellent way for you both to bond. This relaxing technique can be an extremely positive experience for both baby and parent. **b**

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