

# BABY MASSAGE



Mercy Health  
Care first

**Baby massage is the use of positive touch to interact with and support the development of your baby. Massaging your baby can be an enjoyable experience for both you and your baby.**

**The following tips are provided to make massage as enjoyable as possible for you and your baby.**

## Benefits of massage

There is evidence to show that massage improves your baby's:

- relaxation
- digestion
- weight gain
- circulation
- sleep or alertness
- bonding with parents and care givers



## When is a good time for a massage?

- Your baby will be more relaxed when you are too. Make some time to focus on your baby and ensure you are relaxed and not rushed.
- Avoid massage before and after feeding as your baby will not relax as easily if they are hungry or have a full stomach.
- After a bath is a good time as the heat encourages relaxation.

## How do I prepare for baby massage?

- Make sure the room is warm enough for your baby to be without clothes. While in the nursery this can be difficult so you may modify the massage and complete over clothing or swaddle
- Make yourself comfortable and wash your hands.
- If undressing your baby, take your time and go slowly.
- You can have your baby either in your lap or cot. At home you might lay your baby down on a towel on the floor.
- You can massage your baby lying on their back or stomach or side

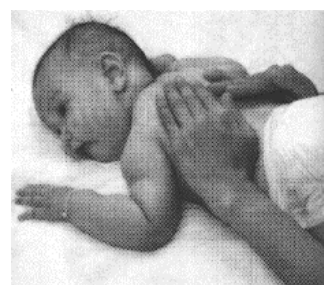
## What type of product should I use?

- Any edible oil or unscented moisturisers are a good choice, particularly cold pressed oils, as these are non-toxic and absorbed well by the skin. An example is cold pressed olive oil.
- Avoid moisturisers or oils containing botanicals and allergy food ingredients (such as nut oils, cow's milk or goat products), as their role in the development of allergies is unknown and they may disrupt the skin barrier.
- Scented products should be avoided as they may affect sensitive skin.

## How do I perform a massage?

There are no strict rules for massaging your baby, as long as the experience is pleasurable for your baby. Some suggestions are:

- Babies usually enjoy gentle but firm touch much more than very light touch, which may be ticklish.
- Use deep, firm stroking or circles and keep one hand on your baby at all times.
- Slow hand movements will make the massage comforting and predictable
- Start your massage at a body part that you know your baby likes being touched. Start at the same place each time.
- Massage different parts of the body in the same order: for example you may start with the head, then move on to the arms, then the legs.
- Massage one part of the body at a time, moving slowly to each new part.
- Massage all of your baby's body including:
  - **the head** - stroke in the direction the hair is growing
  - **arms and legs** - start by circling your hand around the arm or leg close to the body and running your hands all the way to the hand and foot
  - **hands and feet** - you can massage in circles over the palm or sole and gently but firmly stretch the fingers and toes individually
  - **back** - use your hand to stroke from shoulders to bottom
  - **stomach** – move your hands in a clockwise direction to assist digestion
  - **face** – move your hands around the lips and the cheeks from the ear to the mouth.



## How will I know if my baby is enjoying the massage?

Watch your baby's reaction to your touch. Always pause/stop the massage if your baby is showing signs that they are not enjoying it.

Signs that the massage is enjoyable include your baby:

- lying still with relaxed body
- slowly stretching their body (smooth movements)
- holding the hands near the face and mouth
- making eye contact.

## Signs that the baby may not be enjoying the touch include your baby:

- frowning or pulling a face
- arching their backs
- stretching or moving their body away quickly when touched
- turning face away or avoiding eye contact
- moving quickly from an awake state to sleep (shutting down) .

If this happens, move to a different part of their body, slow down your touch or just keep your hand still in one place, firmly but gently. This helps them get use to touch. If your baby is not enjoying the massage, it may be better to try again another time or day.

### For how long and how often should I massage my baby?

- A first massage may only last a few minutes.
- As your baby gets used to touch, you may increase gradually to a 10-to-20-minute massage.
- While in hospital you can massage you baby for as long as they are enjoying it. It doesn't have to be a full massage. You may only massage their leg/feet at nappy time for example.
- At home, you can find your own routine that suits your family and your baby.



### For more information

If you have any questions or need further advice, please call us:

- Monday to Friday
- 8:00am to 4:30pm

Department: Physiotherapy

Ph: (03) 8458 4141

In the event of an emergency, please dial **000** for an ambulance or go to your nearest Mercy Health or other hospital emergency department.

Mercy Hospital for Women.

MHVL Baby massage

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PATIENT INFORMATION:

This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner.

