

## ***Your important health information***

# **Baby massage**

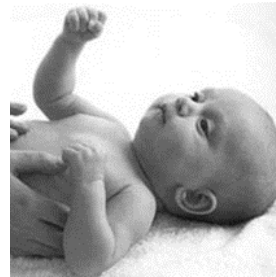
---

Massaging your baby can be a positive experience for you and your baby.

There is no right or wrong technique as long as it involves an enjoyable touch experience.

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

- relaxation
- digestion
- weight gain
- circulation
- sleeping patterns
- bonding with parents.



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

### **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 meal times 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.
- Make yourself comfortable.
- Take your time undressing your baby slowly.
- You can have the baby either in your lap or lying on the floor.
- You can massage your baby lying on their:
  - back
  - stomach.

## What type of oil should I use?

- Any edible oil will be safe, particularly cold pressed oils from the health food shop for example vegetable oil, olive oil or sweet almond oil. These oils are non-toxic and absorbed well by the skin.
- Avoid peanut oil as its role in the development of nut allergies is unknown.
- Scented oils 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 you and 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.
- Slow hand movements will make the massage comforting for your baby.
- Start your massage at a body part that you know your baby likes being touched.
- 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.

Signs that the massage is enjoyable include your baby:

- lying still
- slowly stretching their body
- 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.

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 isn't enjoying 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 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.



#### **Further Information**

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

##### **Physiotherapy Department**

##### **Mercy Hospital for Women**

Phone: 03 8458 4141

##### **Werribee Mercy Hospital**

Phone: 03 8754 3150

#### **Acknowledgements**

Produced by: Physiotherapy Department

Date produced: October 2014

Date of last review: July 2022

Date for review: July 2024