

Infant massage: Understand this soothing therapy

Looking for ways to relax and bond with your baby? Know when and how to give an infant massage.

Infant massage is a way to gently nurture and spend time with your baby. Find out about the possible benefits of infant massage and how to get started.

What are the benefits of infant massage?

Research suggests that infant massage can have various health benefits. For example, infant massage might:

- Encourage interaction between you and your baby
- Help your baby relax and sleep
- Positively affect infant hormones that control stress
- Reduce crying

Although further research is needed, some studies also suggest that infant massage involving moderate pressure might promote growth for premature babies.

When should I massage my baby?

Massaging your baby too soon after a feeding might cause your baby to vomit — so wait at least 45 minutes after a feeding. Also pay close attention to your baby's mood. If your baby has a steady gaze and appears calm and content, he or she might enjoy a massage. If your baby turns his or her head away from you or becomes stiff in your arms, it might not be the best time for a massage.

When and how often you massage your baby is up to you. You might give your newborn a daily massage. Your toddler might enjoy a massage at night as a soothing part of his or her bedtime routine.

How do I massage my baby?

Infant massage involves a little preparation and some basic techniques. To get started:

- **Create a calm atmosphere.** If possible, do the massage in a warm, quiet place — indoors or outdoors. Remove your jewelry. Sit comfortably on the floor or a bed or stand in front of the changing table and position your baby on a blanket or towel in front of

you. Place your baby on his or her back so that you can maintain eye contact. As you undress your baby, tell him or her it's massage time.

- **Control your touch.** When you first start massaging your baby, use a gentle touch. Avoid tickling your baby, however, which might irritate him or her. As your baby grows, use a firmer touch.
- **Slowly stroke and knead each part of your baby's body.** You might start by placing your baby on his or her stomach and spending one minute each rubbing different areas, including your baby's head, neck, shoulders, upper back, waist, thighs, feet and hands. Next, place your baby on his or her back and spend one minute each extending and flexing your baby's arms and legs, and then both legs at the same time. Finally, with your baby either on his or her back or stomach, repeat the rubbing motions for another five minutes.
- **Stay relaxed.** Talk to your baby throughout the massage. You might sing or tell a story. Try repeating your baby's name and the word "relax" as you help him or her release tension.
- **Watch how your baby responds.** If your baby jiggles his or her arms and seems happy, he or she is likely enjoying the massage and you can continue. If your baby turns his or her head away from you or appears restless or unhappy, stop the massage and try again later.

Should I use oil?

It's up to you. Some parents prefer to use oil during infant massage to prevent friction between their hands and the baby's skin, while others find it too messy. If you choose to use oil, select one that's odorless and edible — just in case your baby gets some in his or her mouth. If your baby has sensitive skin or allergies, test the oil first by applying a small amount to a patch of your baby's skin and watching for a reaction.

Is infant massage OK for babies who have health issues?

If your baby has any underlying health issues, talk to your baby's doctor before trying infant massage. The doctor can help you determine if massage is appropriate. You might also ask your baby's doctor if he or she can recommend an infant massage specialist or other qualified expert who can teach you techniques to address your baby's specific needs.

It might take a few tries before you and your baby get the hang of infant massage. Be patient. With a little practice, infant massage can be a healthy way for you and your baby to relax and bond.

