

MASSAGE MAGIC FOR BABIES + CHILDREN

There are many reasons why babies and children should receive a massage and be shown positive, nurturing touch on a daily basis. Research has shown that massaging your child will assist with their health, wellbeing and development, both psychologically and physiologically.

by : Natalie Garmson

MODERN parents are seeking natural, gentle and effective ways to help their baby with many common conditions experienced in the first year of their life. Colic, reflux, constipation and sleeping issues are some examples whereby using specific massage strokes and techniques will help relieve discomfort and pain, and assist your baby's health and development.

Baby massage should only ever be performed by the parent or close caregiver. This is because massage is a form of touch; positive intimate touch as it involves skin-to-skin contact. Touch is very powerful and healing; for a baby, touch is the first form of communication. Your baby is experiencing massage constantly whilst in-utero; for you to

continue massage after your baby is born is not only a wonderful bonding experience for you both, but provides reassurance for your baby. Massage is also a great way to spend quality one-on-one time with your baby.

It is important to learn how to massage your baby from a professional, such as a certified infant massage instructor, or CIMI for short. Infant massage instructors are professionally trained people who have learnt specific infant massage strokes and techniques. A CIMI will ensure that you are applying the correct pressure, rate and rhythm, something you would not receive from simply reading a book on baby massage. Massaging your baby incorrectly could potentially do more harm than good and create more discomfort for your baby.

So what does infant massage involve? Infant massage involves the parent or caregiver massaging their baby using a series of strokes, applying the correct amount of pressure, rhythm and technique. Techniques include Swedish massage, Indian massage and Reflexology. An instructor may also teach parents lymphatic exercises, touch relaxation and the colic massage sequence, which is said to help with colic, wind or constipation.

Massaging your baby is an activity you do with your baby rather than to your baby; the difference being that parents learn to understand and discover how their baby communicates its needs through body language, or their non-verbal cues, such as grizzling or turning their head to the side or

not maintaining eye contact. These are signs that your baby is simply saying 'no thanks' to a massage. Infant and children's massage also teaches kids that it is okay to say 'no' to touch as it teaches them about appropriate touch. It is also about the parent respecting their child's response as to whether they would like a massage or not.

The ideal time to massage your baby is called the 'quiet alert' state; this is when your baby has woken from a sleep and is happy and content to look around the room. For young babies or newborns this may not always be the case, they may wake hungry and cry out for a feed! Massage in this instance may be performed after the feed, allowing fifteen minutes or so for milk or food to be digested. How long you should massage your baby for is always determined by your baby, remembering that when your baby is signalling a 'no' cue that they have had enough massage time and massage should

stop. Ceasing massage at this point may also prevent over-stimulation.

According to the Touch Research Institute in Miami, Florida, and the University of Warwick Medical School in the United Kingdom, studies show that massage for babies and children on a regular basis has many benefits, including increased weight gain in premature and low birth weight babies, and can help with developing the parent-infant relationship. Another study found an improvement in the mother-infant interaction with those mothers who had post-natal depression. Established by Dr Tiffany Field, Ph.D, the Touch Research Institute was the first research centre worldwide solely dedicated to the study of touch. The centre has over 40 research papers on infant massage and children's massage alone. Studies undertaken by The University of Warwick assert that massage may help infants sleep more soundly, cry less and reduce levels of the stress hormone,

cortisol. Other benefits noted include strengthening the immune system and relief from discomfort and pain.

Massage is also an effective therapy for many childhood conditions, including autism, cancer, asthma, Down syndrome and cerebral palsy.

Massage benefits babies and children in so many ways. The power of touch is in your hands; modern parents in western civilisation are now discovering massage and feeling confident and empowered at the same time. Most of all, it is easy to learn and lots of fun for both parent and child!

Natalie Garmson is a certified infant massage instructor, massage in schools instructor and a mother of two boys who both have received massage since birth. She is dedicated to educating and teaching massage instruction and raising awareness of infant and children's massage. Natalie's website is www.idibidikids.com.au.



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