

# Baby Massage

Western civilisation has only recently discovered the gentle art of baby massage, something that other cultures have been practicing for thousands of years. Touch is so powerful that it has crept into our language. We use phrases like ‘to get the feel of...’, ‘to get in touch...’, ‘to be able to handle...’

There are a lot of books, leaflets and videos on how to do baby massage, and there is more than one ‘right’ way to do it. There are however some positions and movements that babies enjoy more than others, particularly very young babies, and knowing about these makes the massage more enjoyable.

## When to massage

- Each family needs to find the time that suits them best.
- It is best to wait 20 minutes or so after a feed but not too close to sleep time.
- Some families massage after bath time when the baby is already undressed, as many young babies dislike being dressed and undressed. Some babies respond better in the evening.
- It is not a good idea to try to massage a baby who is upset.

## How often to massage

Baby massage can be done whenever it suits the family routines, but don’t feel pressured that you have to do it. Be guided by what your baby likes and how you feel as well.

## What you need

- A warm room, free of draughts.
- A time when you are not likely to be interrupted.
- Soft music.
- Warm hands. Take off any spiky jewellery.
- Towels.
- Babies, particularly the very young, are more settled if ‘contained’ and with their body slightly curved. Use cushions or rugs to support them (a c-shaped cushion or similar, to surround and ‘nestle’ the baby can be good).
- Old clothes, as you might get oily.
- Any ‘baby’ oils would be safe. We prefer ‘natural’ oils, such as sweet almond oil. Tip the oil into a warm bowl.

## What to do

There are many recognised techniques and sequences used in baby massage. Here is one way to do baby massage that babies enjoy.

Begin with baby’s feet.

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Use firm but gentle and slow strokes, as this is the type of touch that relaxes. Some babies, especially very young babies, may only want you to massage their feet to begin with and this is okay.

Move slowly up the Lower leg to the thigh and across the hips. Then try putting both hands on the baby's shoulders and stroking from the shoulders towards the middle of the chest.

Or you can go from the shoulder, slowly down the arm to the fingers (wipe oil from his fingers before he sucks them).

Abdominal (tummy) strokes should go in circles, clockwise as you look at the baby's tummy. Only massage the tummy if it feels soft and the baby doesn't become unsettled or squirmy.

Using one hand start at the lower right side of the baby's tummy.

Move gently up and across the tummy (clockwise).

Finish on the left side of the baby's tummy.

Go back to the feet or stop the massage if the baby shows any sign of being uncomfortable or not enjoying themselves. To massage the face you can stroke across the forehead and across the cheeks.

Massage using index or middle finger. Begin at the middle and move outwards to the sides of the face.

Begin at the sides of the nose and move outwards.

If you are both still relaxed, turn the baby onto his tummy and try some long, smooth, relaxing strokes from head to toe. If the baby is propped up slightly they may enjoy this for longer.

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Begin at the head and move slowly down the back to the legs and toes.

When the massage is finished, dress your baby slowly and in a relaxed way to maintain the feelings of comfort and relaxation.

## What massage does

Massage should be enjoyable for both parent and baby. It provides lots of benefits such as:

- Learning to know each other.
- Communicating.
- Helping the baby to feel safe and loved.
- Stimulation of different body systems (immune system, circulation, digestion) enhancing development (encourages movement and coordination).
- Helping parents and baby to learn to trust and have confidence in each other.

Whether you do massage or not, being touched and held and stroked are very important for your baby's emotional development.

*Reference: Department of Health WA. This information in this topic was originally developed by Children, Youth and Women's Health Service/ Parenting and Child Health. Website: <http://www.cyh.com>*

## For more information contact

- Local Community Health Nurse.
- Local Family Doctor.
- Ngala Family Resource Centre Helpline website [www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au).
- Parent Help Centre/Parenting Line: Phone: (08) 9272 1466 (24 hr service)

<http://www.meerilinga.org.au/children-parenting/parenting-tips>

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