

Infant Massage

Touch is an important way to both bond with and communicate with your baby. All babies need touch to be healthy, and to grow and develop. Research has shown that massage may also help your baby's immune system. The immune system is the body's defense against infection. Infant massage involves slowly and gently rubbing each part of your baby's body. You can spend about 1 minute each on your baby's head, shoulders, arms, back, tummy, and legs.

Infant massage may be helpful if your baby:

- Cries a lot due to colic, teething, gas, or constipation
- Has tense muscles
- Has trouble sleeping
- Is premature

Infant massage can also help parents:

- Feel more connected and in tune with your baby. This can be helpful for you if your partner is breast-feeding.
- Get to know your baby's temperament. It can also help you become more familiar with your baby's body. This helps alert you to changes from illness or other conditions.

How do I start?

- If your baby has any type of health problem, talk with your healthcare provider before you try infant massage.
- Choose a relaxing time to massage your baby. This can be when the baby wakes, after a bath, before bed, or whenever it fits in well. If your baby is fussy, choose another time. To help prevent vomiting, wait at least 1 hour after feeding before massaging. When you give the massage, make sure that the room is not too bright, and no light is shining directly on the baby's face. Keep the room warm and free from drafts.
- Place a large bath towel or blanket under your baby before you start the massage. You may want to play some soft, soothing music during the massage.
- Undress your baby down to her diaper. Remove your rings and bracelets.
- You may want to massage your baby with oil, but it is not required. Plant oils (such as sunflower, safflower, or grape seed oil) are better than baby oil, because they are easily absorbed into the skin. Avoid highly scented, thick oils such as olive oil. Do not use nut oils. They can cause an allergic reaction. Test the oil on the inside of your own and the baby's wrist and wait 24 hours to make sure there isn't any irritation. Do not use if you see any reddening or other reaction.
- To begin the massage, lay your baby on her back and make eye contact with her. Talk to her with a soothing tone or sing softly. This helps to create a connection with her.

- There are different techniques for massage – a common one is included here. Start with her legs and feet using slow, long, gentle strokes. Then move to her chest, starting with a long stroke at the stomach that moves up to the shoulders. Then, continue the long slow strokes down the arms. End with massaging your baby's back, slowly moving from her bottom up to her shoulders. Pay attention to what your baby likes the most. If your baby becomes fussy or tense or looks or pulls away from you, stop the massage and give her a break.

You may want to take a class to learn how to massage your baby. Check with your healthcare provider, community center, hospital, or massage therapists in your area.

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