



BABY MASSAGE

There are many benefits of massage for premature babies. Massage may help your baby put on weight, assist with circulation and encourage relaxation and sleep. Importantly, massage helps your baby develop a positive response to touch and can strengthen the bond between you and your baby.

The key focus of massage is for your baby to have an enjoyable experience. Watch your baby's response to see if they are enjoying the massage or if they need extra time to adjust and get used to it.

- Signs your baby is enjoying the massage: their body and face seem relaxed, they have little body movement, they may focus on your face.
- Signs your baby may need to have a break/pause: they may frown, increasingly move around or arch their back, turn away, change colour, or start fussing.
- Signs to finish: they may start crying or falling asleep.

How do I start massaging my baby?

Before you start, make sure your hands are thoroughly washed and warm. Check that your baby is ready. While you are in hospital, you may get some advice from the neonatal allied health team. They can show you the massage technique that is best for your baby.

The first massage may take longer. You will probably need to take it slowly and pause as your baby gets used to a different type of touch. Keep your hands still in a gentle hold and wait for signs that your baby is ready for you to start massaging again.

Tips for baby massage

- A good time for massage is when your baby is awake and active – about half an hour after a feed. Avoid times when your baby is hungry or has just had a feed.
- Start with a body part that you know they like having touched (e.g. head).
- Use slow movements as this has a calming effect.
- Use firm, gentle strokes as light touch can be ticklish.
- Try to keep one hand in contact with your baby throughout the massage. This consistent touch helps your baby feel secure.
- Use the same movement sequence as this helps your baby know what to expect.

What to use for baby massage

Use unscented/fragrance free moisturising lotions or creams without dyes and preservatives for baby massage. Avoid massage oils. Check with your baby's treating team about what is an appropriate lotion and always check for a reaction on a small area of skin first before using for massage.

Whilst there are many benefits of baby massage, it may not be suitable for all babies. Babies who are 34 weeks' corrected age or older and medically stable may be appropriate for massage. For premature babies, we recommend that their parents perform massage under the guidance of the neonatal allied health team. Check with your baby's treating team before commencing baby massage in the NICU.

For information about certified baby massage programs see the International Association of Infant Massage website www.iaim.net