

# Baby's First Massage

Taken from Baby's First Massage by Teresa Kirkpatrick Ramsey and adapted from a handout written by Kathleen Crouse, NCMT, New Castle, DE.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF NEWBORN MASSAGE?

- pleasurable experiences assist baby and caregiver with bonding
- facilitates early infant communication to enhance family harmony
- increases circulation and assists in the newborn's healing process
- promotes rest and relaxation, better digestion, weight gain, and elimination
- uses "cephalocaudal" strokes, which move from head to toe, from the center of the body to the extremities, which helps protect newborns with underdeveloped nervous systems from compromise during the healing period

## NEWBORN MASSAGE INSTRUCTIONS

- Massage can be done several times a day and is good before bedtime. Set aside between 15 and 30 minutes for the massage, preferably immediately before an anticipated breastfeeding or, if baby is bottle fed, do massage 30 minutes after a feeding.
- Before you begin, washing your hands thoroughly. When using lotion or oil for the massage, avoid contaminating the cord or area immediately surrounding the cord.
- Alternate massage sessions with your partner, one of you reading these instructions aloud while the other is massaging your newborn.
- Keep baby swaddled (loosely) so that they don't get cold and waste energy keeping their body heat up.
- If the baby refuses to look at you (gaze aversion) or exhibits two of the following signals, stop, comfort him and start again later.
  - arching of the back
  - splaying of the fingers (looks like they are holding up their hand to say stop)
  - the "I need help cry"
- Use a VERY small amount of oil or lotion, preferably unscented. Cold-pressed Safflower oil is best as it causes the baby to gain fat under the skin to increase weight. Be sure to warm the oil with your hands.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Your strokes should always go from head to toe, from the center of the body out to the fingers or toes. Once the massage begins, always keep one hand in contact with the baby. Make sure your hands and the room are warm and that you are comfortable. Tell your baby "I'm going to give you a massage, are you ready?" and let them hear you rub your hands together as you warm a few drops of oil. Babies can learn these cues and will learn to anticipate this experience.

Throughout the massage, talk soothingly to your baby, telling him or her what you are about to do. If the baby gives any time-out cues, stop and comfort the baby and allow him or her to come back to a centered space before proceeding. If baby becomes overwhelmed twice in less than five minutes, stop the massage and wait a while to continue. Perhaps you might even wait until tomorrow.

**The Legs:** With baby on its back, lay both hands alongside the babies face for a few seconds, this allows them to adjust to your touch. Unwrap one of the baby's legs, and remove the sock. Gently but firmly support the ankle and place the thumb of one hand on the sole of the foot. Use the other hand to rub gently from the hip to the ankle, using just enough pressure to make good contact, but not so much as to drag the skin. Repeat this stroke 3-4 times. Cover the leg with the blanket. Do this same procedure on the other leg.

**The Abdomen:** Uncover the abdomen. Warm a few drops of oil by rubbing your hands together. The abdominal stroke is called the "I Love U" stroke because you make the pattern of the first letter of each word. Begin on the baby's left side, stay below the ribs. Make a capital "I" stroking from the ribs to the groin. Then, make an upside down "L" to empty the transverse colon. Then make an upside down "U" to empty the entire large intestine. SEE THAT YOU ARE MOVING IN THE DIRECTION THAT THE HANDS OF A CLOCK MOVE. Repeat the entire sequence 2 -3 more times. This is a wonderful stroke. If a baby is gassy or constipated, this stroke will greatly assist the baby. Do this stroke sequence before each feeding to resolve these problems.

**The Abdomen:** Use the tip of the finger or fingernail and very lightly, in a ticklish fashion, begin a clockwise, spiraling motion from the edge of the cord out to the edge of the abdomen. Move quickly. Pick up your finger and come back to the edge of the cord and begin spiraling out again. If the baby is constipated, it will require 5-6 minutes of this stroking to get the peristalsis moving. Move clockwise.

**The Chest:** Uncover the chest and remove the T-shirt, but cover the arms and legs. Warm a few drops of oil. Lay your hands on the chest and just be calm there for a moment. This is a sensitive area. With one hand remaining in place, move the other hand down the chest, over the nipple line down to the groin. If the baby takes sharp, deep inhalations, slow down the speed of the stroke. Repeat 3-4 times, then change hands. Always provide the containment, the security that the one hand held in place provides. Cover the chest.

**The Arms:** Uncover one arm and warm a few drops of oil. Put firm pressure on the baby's palm with one thumb, then stroke from the shoulder to the wrist, rocking the hand back and forth as you move down the arm. Repeat 3-4 times, then cover the arm. Repeat this on the other arm. If the baby holds the arm in tightly to the chest, try asking the baby if you may have his/her arm. I can't explain why, but they usually do relax their arms. You can also try holding the arm slightly up by the hand with the tips of your fingers, and gently shake it.

**The Back:** Place the baby on his/her abdomen and remove the blanket from the back area, but keep the arms and legs covered. Warm a few drops of oil. Gently lay both hands on the back and let them rest there for a few moments. Keep one hand in place while you do these 2 strokes down the back to the diaper. Gently run your hands down the back. Repeat 3-4 times. Then, begin making little circles down the spinal erector muscles that are alongside the vertebrae. Repeat 3-4 times. If the baby arches, slow down the speed of movement. Change hands and repeat these strokes on the other side.

**The Legs:** Complete the massage by stroking the legs again using the same rotary movement, beginning at the hip and stroking down. Repeat 3-4 times on both legs.

**The Scalp:** Be gentle in stroking over cephalhematomas (your healthcare provider would have told you if the baby has one). To stroke the scalp, make little circles all over the scalp.

**The Face:** For the face and scalp, no oil is needed. Place one hand alongside the face and keep it there for all the strokes, then move over to the other side. With the free hand, begin at the middle of the forehead and stroke down to the cheek 3-4 times. Then, using one finger, begin at the inner corner of the eye and stroke under the eye and up over the ear. Repeat this 3-4 times.

**The Face:** The last stroke on the face is to use firm pressure on the lips and trace your finger around the mouth 3-4 times. If you are wise, you will wait and do this last. By this time, many babies are fully alert and ready to eat. Stroking the lips encourages the baby to root and they will much prefer eating to massage. Of course, you now change hands and repeat the strokes on the other side of the face. Remember, it is the face and skull that receive most of the trauma from the squeezing and molding during birth. Some babies may have quite a bit to say about it! When you are done, wrap the baby warm and snugly.