

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Infant Massage

Touch is an important way to communicate with your baby. Infants need touch to be healthy, to grow and develop. Infant massage is a special way of touching your baby that has many benefits.

What are the benefits?

- **Relaxation.** Gently massaging a baby eases their muscles and reduces tension. This can help with colic, releasing gas and easing muscle spasms that often accompany colic. Massage can also help ease the pain of teething and constipation. Massage can reduce fussiness and irritability and help the baby sleep better. The person giving the massage also gets the benefit of relaxation.
- **Bonding.** Spending time caressing and touching your baby with loving care can help you feel more connected and in tune with your baby. This can be helpful for the father, who may feel left out, especially if the mother is breast-feeding.
- **Growth and development.** Research has shown that infant massage can stimulate growth promoting hormones. This can result in increased weight gain, which is very important in premature babies. It can also improve immune functions which can result in fewer illnesses.
- **Communication.** Talking to your baby as you massage her teaches her valuable communication skills. Babies learn to speak by watching your lips form words, by listening to the tone of your voice, and by hearing the words.
- **Increased awareness of the baby.** Infant massage can help you 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?

- Choose a relaxing time to massage your baby. This can be upon waking, after a bath, before bed, or whenever it fits in well. It helps to be on a regular schedule.
- When you give the massage, make sure that the room not too bright, and that there is no light shining directly on the baby's face. Keep the room warm and free from drafts.

- Most babies prefer massage with oil. Vegetable or plant oils (such as grape seed oil and sweet almond oil) are better than baby oil, because they are easily absorbed into the skin. Look for an oil that says it "cold pressed" on the label. Do not use nut oils. They can cause an allergic reaction.
- It is best to massage babies while they are not wearing clothes - not even a diaper. This allows more contact and is more relaxing for the baby.

How do I massage my baby?

It is best to start with the legs and feet using slow, long, gentle strokes. It is recommended that you then move to the chest, starting a long stroke at the stomach that moves up to the shoulders. Then, continue the long slow strokes down the arms. End with massaging the baby's back, slowly moving from the bottom up to the shoulders. Pay attention to what your baby likes the most. Remember this if for them! Stop massaging if the baby cries and try again at another time.

Infant massage is an activity that comes naturally to many parents. However, there may be special situations. For example, babies who have a seizure disorder or motor impairments may not respond well to infant massage. If you have trouble, there are massage therapists who specialize in infant massage. There are also classes that parents can attend to learn how to massage their babies. These are often offered at community centers, pediatrician's offices, hospitals, and massage centers.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.