

Chapter 7

Infant and Child Massage



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“A silent dialogue of love
between a mother and her baby.”

Loving Hands by Frederick Leboyer

Massaging your baby is done with your heart and not just your hands. Your gentle touch during massage, and at other times, communicates a message of love to your baby.

Your baby needs your loving touch to grow emotionally and physically strong. Massage helps your baby to relax and let go of tension. Many parents happily report that after a massage, their babies sleep better, have an easier time with feeding, and experience fewer stomach upsets.

Young babies can seem too tiny and fragile. Massaging your baby helps you get in touch with your baby. It builds your confidence in being able to understand your baby's unique body language. This confidence can help you deal with other tasks of parenting, both now and as your baby grows.



Acknowledgments

The concept of infant massage, the various strokes, and the information in preparing a child for massage has been championed in the United States by Vimala Schneider McClure. From studies and travels in India, Vimala learned the importance of traditional Indian massage for its soothing effects and positive nonverbal communication. As a result of her experiences and efforts, the International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM) conducts and sponsors yearly workshops promoting infant massage training.

Information in this section on Infant Massage was supported by information presented in *Infant Massage: A Handbook for Loving Parents* by Vimala Schneider, published by Bantam Books. We appreciate the work Vimala has done to help all of us learn about nurturing touch with infants. We encourage individuals interested in learning more about infant massage or infant massage training to contact the International Association of Infant Massage.

Before Beginning to Massage Your Baby

Create a special time for you and your baby each day. Be flexible. Some days you may have more time than others. Perhaps you have a quiet half hour when baby awakens from his nap. Maybe you have a few minutes while changing his diaper or just before his bath.

Be sensitive to your baby's moods and try to choose a time when he is not too tired or hungry. He will not be able to relax and respond to you if his needs are unmet. Also, be aware of your needs and create a time for massage when you feel relaxed enough from distractions.

Warmth is especially important for newborns who tend to lose body heat rapidly. Find a sunny spot on your bed, plug in a heating pad under baby's blanket, or use a space heater to warm the room. Create a space that is comfortable, warm, and free from distractions.

Make sure you are comfortable. Sit cross-legged on a couch or bed with baby in front of you or lean back against the wall with baby lying on your extended legs.

Unplug the phone and close the door. Tape a sign on the door reading: **Please Do Not Disturb, Massage in Progress.** Choose an area which is away from the TV, noise, and the rest of your family. Some babies begin to smile and anticipate their massage as soon as they arrive in your special place.



What You Will Need

- Oil** To allow your hands to move smoothly during the massage. Try to use a natural fruit or vegetable oil such as coconut oil or safflower oil.
- Towel or Quilt** To lay baby on.
- Extra diapers** To use if baby needs to be changed.
- Pillow** To help newborns feel more secure. The support of a pillow helps reduce their reflexive tendency to startle.
- Change of clothes** To dress your baby after the massage.
- Music** Soft, relaxing music to relax you and your baby.