



Infant Massage

*One of the best ways to communicate love to your baby is by touch.
Infant massage is easy, calming, and helps parents build an everlasting bond.
Communication for the baby is first received and developed through the skin.
Massaged babies are more active and alert, have greater weight gain,
and have more mature neurological development than babies who do not receive massage.
This handout will guide you through tips and techniques for massaging your infant.*

Benefits:

- Releases tension in your infant – and YOU!
- Helps you understand your baby's needs and cues
- Skin stimulation is essential for psychological development
- Increases your baby's ability to regulate her own body temperature
- Forms a bond between you and your baby
- Your baby is more likely to respond to others with empathy and warmth, and respond to social problems with compassion and altruism
- Provides your baby with natural immunization due to antibodies and bacteria being shared between you and your baby
- Daily massage yields the greatest benefit

Enhancing Your Experience:

- As you massage your baby:
 - Sing to him in a soft voice
 - Hum to her
 - Talk with your baby by telling a story, sharing about your day, or simply explain what you are doing as you do it
 - Turn on soft music
- Take it slow:
 - Respond to your baby. If she is stiff, slow down and talk with her about relaxation. If he is crying, soothe him first. If she is uninterested, try again at another time.
 - Start with just a few techniques and strokes. Then, integrate a few new ones over a period of time.
- Great times to incorporate infant massage:
 - During growth spurts
 - After bath
 - Before bedtime/nap
 - Morning after eating
 - During illness/fever
 - To relieve gas
 - To soothe general fussiness

Special Considerations:

- Make eye contact with your baby, smile, and use your voice to soothe and communicate with him.
- You may incorporate massage into your older baby or child's routine! Adapt the strokes for a mobile child, and respond to what your child likes or dislikes.
- Pick a time of day that works best for you and your infant/child.
- Avoid tickling, fluttering fingers, and poking movements with your massage.
- Have your touch be soft, firm, but gentle – mold your hands to your baby
- Long, slow, rhythmic strokes are recommended.
- If your baby finds massage stimulating rather than relaxing, consider doing it after nap time.



Getting Started

Preparations:

- Choose a warm, quiet place – provide a small space heater, if necessary; *warmth is important*
- Remove jewelry and wash your hands
- Place a clean towel on the floor or changing table – use a yoga mat for extra padding on hard floors
- Choose your light, food grade oil:
 - Olive
 - Coconut
 - Avocado
 - Almond
 - Mustard
 - Apricot seed
 - Jojoba
- Place your baby in front of you, close by
- Sit cross-legged, or with open legs – be sure you are comfortable, and use pillows or wedges to help you
- Close your eyes. Visualize a relaxed baby – happy and healthy.
- Roll your shoulders – notice any anxiety or tension and release it
- Breathe deeply and fully – release all air from your lungs.
 - Breathe in for a count of 4
 - Release your breath for a count of 4
 - Repeat until you are relaxed
- Release any negative emotions and fill yourself with love for your baby. Relaxation is a skill you will build with practice. 😊
- Undress your baby gently. If removing the diaper, place a small clean cloth over the baby's genitals so you don't get wet by accident.
- Request permission from your baby to begin massage, or say, "It's massage time!"



Techniques and Strokes

All suggestions on this handout have been directly excerpted from, Infant Massage: A Handbook for Loving Parents, by Vimala McClure. Please refer to the book for more techniques, strokes, routines, and photos.

Touch Relaxation:

- ∞ Place hands around part of baby you will be focusing on with gentle touch (foot, leg, arm, etc.)
- ∞ Feel your hands get warm and heavy
- ∞ Gently rock or bounce that body part
- ∞ Repeat in a soft voice, “Relax”, “Release”, or “Let go”.
- ∞ When baby relaxes, praise him: “Great! You relaxed your leg.” “How nice and soft your tummy is!”
- ∞ Move to another body part and repeat

Resting Hands:

- ∞ Warm your hands by rubbing them together
- ∞ Place them on your baby (abdomen, shoulders, back, legs)
- ∞ Let your hands get heavy and warm
- ∞ Relax your body
- ∞ Slow your breath
- ∞ Imagine relaxation and healing flowing from you into your baby

Suggested Abbreviated Massage

The following massage is listed on p 127 in the aforementioned book. It’s a nice, short massage sequence to learn with. *Word-for-word descriptions of the strokes from the text follow.* You may want to begin your session with Resting Hands or Touch Relaxation.

1. Cup head in hands. If baby likes, make circles around head
2. Open Book, on forehead
3. Relax the Jaw
4. Open Book, on chest
5. Rolling, on arms; open hands
6. Sun Moon, or I Love You, on stomach
7. Rolling, on legs
8. Thumb Press, on soles of feet
9. Back and Forth, on back
10. Combing, on back

Open Book (face) – Using the flat part of your fingers, start at the middle of the forehead and stroke out to the sides, as if flattening the pages of a book, moving your hands down along the sides of the face. Try not to cover your baby’s eyes and nose with your hands.

Relax the Jaw – Make small circles around the jaw with your fingertips.

Open Book (chest) – With both hands together at the center of the chest, stroke out to the sides, following the ribcage, as if you were flattening the pages of a book. Keep your hands in contact with your baby as you move them down, around, and up to your starting point again, similar to a heart-shaped motion. The pressure is from the center of the chest outward; the rest is just to keep hands in contact with the body.

Rolling – Roll your baby’s arm between your hands from shoulder to wrist, several times.

Sun Moon – Your left hand strokes in a full circle, moving clockwise starting at your left (7 o’clock). As the left hand is making the lower part of the circle, the right hand makes a half moon above, just below the rib cage, stroking from baby’s right to left (your left to right), like an upside-down U.

I Love You – As you go through this series of strokes, say, “I love you!” in a high-pitched cooing tone. Your baby will love it. First, make a single I-shaped stroke with your right hand on baby’s left belly several times, pressing the pads of your fingers straight down from baby’s rib cage (IIIIIIIIIIII...).

Next, make a backward, sideways L going from your left to right and then down (Loooooooooove...).

Make an upside-down U, going from your left to right (from baby’s right to left), with the upper part of the stroke under the rib cage (Yooooooooooooou!).

Rolling (legs) – Roll the leg between your hands from thigh to ankle. Most babies love this!

Thumb Press – Press in with your thumbs all over the bottom of the foot.

Back and Forth – begin with your baby on her belly across your lap on a towel. Do “Resting Hands”. Now start with both hands together at the top of the back, at right angles to the spine. Stroke your hands back and forth, perpendicular to the spine, alternating, molding your hands to the baby’s back. Move down to the buttocks, then back up to the shoulders, and back down once again.

Combing – With baby on belly across your lap on a towel, make “combing” strokes from the shoulders to buttocks, with your fingers spread apart, each stroke getting lighter and lighter, ending with a “feather touch”. This tells your baby you are finished with the massage.

Special Conditions:

Gas:

- ∞ *Water Wheel*: Make paddling strokes on your baby’s tummy, one hand following the other as if you were scooping a depression into sand. Keep your hands molded to the baby’s tummy. Do not use the edge of your hand. Repeat 6 times. Next, hold your baby’s legs up with one hand, grasping the ankles gently. Your baby’s body should be close to you, hips anchored firmly on the floor. Do not lift the baby’s body. With your other hand, repeat the paddling motion. This will relax the stomach and permit you to extend the massage a little more deeply. Another way to hold your baby’s legs up for this stroke is to cross your right hand under the baby’s left leg and hold onto the right, so your right arm holds up both legs. Stroke with the left hand. (Reverse this if your dominant hand is the right.)
- ∞ *Sun Moon*: See above.
- ∞ *Up Down*: Push the knees together up into the tummy then stretch them out straight. If the baby resists straightening her legs, bounce them gently and encourage her to relax. Repeat several times.
- ∞ *Bicycle*: Gently push the knees into the tummy, one after the other then bounce them out straight to relax. The rhythm is push right – push left – push right – straighten, alternating the leg you start with each time.

Baby's with Special Needs:

Some babies with special needs can be easily overwhelmed by a well-intended massage. Some babies can be over-stimulated by touch, sound, and too much light. Getting to know your baby will help you learn what kind of touch, sound and light your baby prefers. The following are some suggestions. Be sure to work with your child's therapist(s) if you have any questions about certain strokes, and they can even help you develop a unique massage flow for your child.

Tactile Sensitive:

- ∞ Begin your massage practice leaving your baby's clothes on.
- ∞ Try Resting Hands first, then Touch Relaxation
- ∞ Try a slow, firm stroke down the center of her back for increased brain organization
- ∞ Firm pressure and stroking
- ∞ Brisk rubbing with terrycloth in a warm bath before massage

Developmental Challenges:

- ∞ Resting Hands
- ∞ Inhibitory techniques:
 - Slow, long, sweeping strokes
 - Gentle shaking
 - Positioning
 - Rocking
 - Neutral warmth
 - Touch Relaxation
- ∞ Facilitating techniques:
 - Icing
 - Brushing
 - Positioning
 - Pressure
 - Vibration

After Surgery (with physician's permission):

- ∞ Resting Hands
- ∞ Touch Relaxation

Adopted or Foster Children:

- ∞ Request permission to begin
- ∞ Build trust by feeding the child/baby
- ∞ Begin massage with your infant or child fully clothed, in order to build trust.
- ∞ Resting Hands – if this is too much, try just holding your baby's legs
- ∞ Touch Relaxation
- ∞ Be sure to make eye contact and smile
- ∞ Provide familiar sights, sounds and scents in your massage environment

Reference:

McClure, V. S. (2000). *Infant massage: A handbook for loving parents*. New York: Bantam Books.

Videos for more techniques:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbCv6BBTV5c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UnT99A0vSE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XljzBfzIFa0>

Compiled by: Jen Jester www.birthwisely.com