



# INTRODUCTION

Tips on getting started in baby massage

## Why should I massage my baby?

Baby massage has been practised in many cultures for thousands of years, and research shows many benefits. This guide has been created to give you examples of what you will learn in a massage class. Through massage, you can gain increased awareness of how your baby communicates and ideas on ways to support your baby in their first few months. You and your baby will discover what is best for you both. It is important to be mindful that massage is something you do **with**, rather than **to** your baby.

It is recommended that you learn more from someone with a qualification in infant massage to gain the full benefit. Going to a baby massage group is an ideal way to learn to massage your baby safely.

The International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM) has been instructing parents around the world for over 25 years. For more information, go to [www.iaim.net](http://www.iaim.net)

These massage strokes are based on *INFANT MASSAGE: A Handbook for Loving Parents* by Vimala McClure, the founder of the IAIM.

*The IAIM is a non-profit organisation and does not endorse any product.*

The benefits of regular massage may:

- Help you and your baby understand each other better
- Soothe babies and reduce crying
- Aid digestion and help relieve colic, wind and constipation

- Help babies to sleep more deeply and for longer
- Relieve nasal congestion and teething discomfort
- Help develop good muscle tone, co-ordination and suppleness
- Enhance body awareness
- Boost the immune system
- Improve skin texture
- Help calm and relax both parent and baby
- Boost parents' confidence in handling their baby

## Getting started

- Choose a time when your baby is awake and alert, not too hungry or too full
- Set the scene by ensuring the room is warm and lighting not too bright
- Have what you need at hand: oil, towel, clean nappies and clothes
- Wash your hands and remove jewellery such as watches
- Make sure that you have a safe and comfortable place to do the massage and position your baby so that they can see your face clearly
- Before starting, take time to relax with a few full breaths letting go of any tension
- Remember that all babies are different, changing all the time. For instance, young babies may feel more secure if most of their clothes are left on and they feel close to their parents' body

## Asking permission (a)

Only massage your baby when he or she is awake and ready to engage. 'Asking permission' to undress or to massage them helps the baby develop trust in you. This encourages a healthy attitude to being touched in a loving and respectful way.

Sometimes your baby may not be in the mood for massage, for instance if they are hungry, tired or not feeling well. It is important to watch and respond to your baby's body language and offer the massage at another time.

When you are sure the baby is ready, rub a few drops of oil into your hands as you ask your baby's permission – "Can I give you a massage?"



Remember that massage is baby-lead and adapt the pace of the strokes to your baby's response. These responses or 'baby language' are called 'infant cues'. It is important that the session is a happy time for both you and your baby.

## Finish with a 'Thank You' (b)

When you and your baby feel that you have come to the end of the massage, gently say thank you. This is when you give a goodbye stroke with both hands from the shoulders to the toes or perhaps give a kiss and a cuddle or sing a little song.



## NEWBORN

Touch is a powerful way to communicate your love to your baby. In the first few weeks, use slow and positive strokes, not spending too much time on one area. Newborn babies may find their senses over-stimulated and most will seek solace in the arms of their parents for the first few weeks and some may just want a gentle stroke down their backs, over their clothes.

### Postnatal depression and using touch to communicate and bond

After the birth of their baby, many mothers and some fathers may suffer from some form of depression. 'Baby Blues' is common and can leave mum feeling elated one moment and very emotional the next. This usually disappears after a few days. Depression is a more serious and longer lasting condition and can show signs anytime from straight after the baby's birth or later. Research into postnatal depression shows that massage can enhance parent and baby attachment, through encouraging eye contact, skin contact, voice and sensitive interaction.



### Resting hands (a)

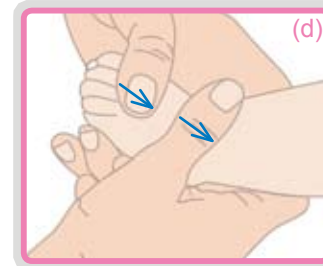
If your baby says 'yes' to massage, begin with a resting hand. This resting hand technique is used before massaging any body area. It can also be used when your baby needs a break during the massage. This is a good way for your baby to feel secure and enjoy touch.

### Legs

Check you have enough oil on your hands before you start. Begin on the legs with a newborn because it is an area which is usually accepted by babies. Downward strokes are more relaxing.

### Legs – milking (b)

With one hand, gently hold your baby's ankle. Place your other hand at the top of your baby's thigh, moulding it around the leg, then slide it to the ankle. Repeat with firm yet gentle rhythmic strokes, one hand after the other.



### Feet (c & d)

Babies usually love having their feet massaged. Watch your baby's reactions in case of sensitivity. A little foot massage can have a positive effect on the whole body.

Gently squeeze and roll each toe between your thumb and index finger.

Using alternate thumbs stroke the top of the foot from toes to the ankle. Repeat several times.

### Tummy (e)

When baby's umbilical cord is healed, gentle massage on the tummy can help with digestion and tummy troubles.

Start by making contact with your baby's tummy with a reassuring relaxed hand.

If your baby is happy, make gentle paddling strokes, with one hand following the other.



### Back (f)

Skin-to-skin contact can enhance the bonding experience between baby, mum and dad.

Holding the baby close to your chest, massage your baby's back beginning at the neck, swooping down to their bottom.

