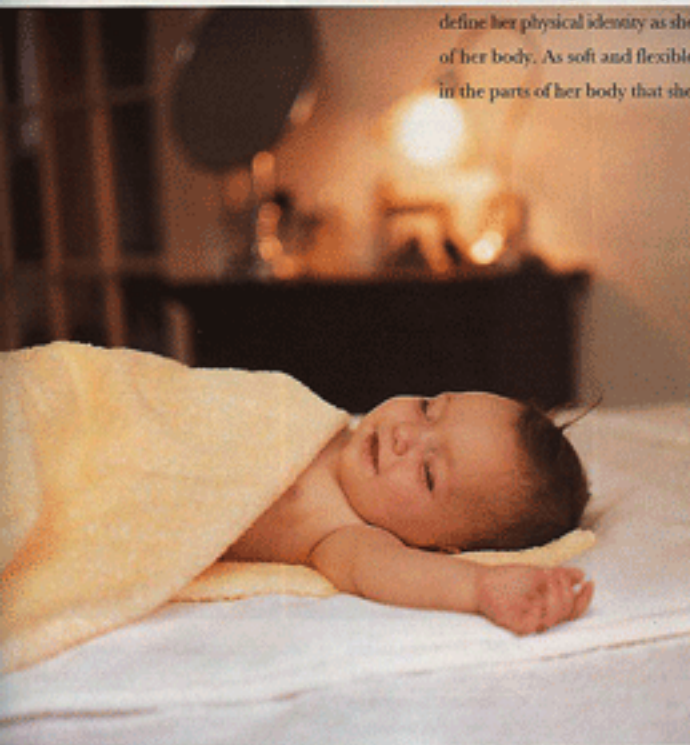


baby massage

BABIES THRIVE ON TOUCH. Physical contact is a basic human need, as important to infants as milk and sleep. For the most part, parents instinctively provide this nurturing touch—holding their babies; rocking, bathing, and diapering them; caressing the sweet softness of their heads; kissing their cheeks; stroking their backs; holding them close for breast-feeding or a bottle. Infant massage is really just a concentrated dose of this essential human nurturing. And not surprisingly, it is rewarding for both parent and child.

Since ancient times and across diverse cultures, the soothing and healing benefits of infant massage have been recognized. Modern studies on premature babies further document this knowledge. Massaged daily, premature infants develop more rapidly physically and neurologically. After six weeks they are more alert, cry less, and show lower levels of stress than those who are not massaged; they are more social, more emotionally expressive, and easier to soothe; and they have notably higher levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that produces a sense of well-being. Many parents also attest to the power of massage. They claim it helps their active babies calm down and settle for sleep. It triggers processes that aid in digestion and relieve gastrointestinal discomfort in colicky babies.

Infant massage is not only soothing and pleasurable, it can also help your baby to define her physical identity as she learns to understand the size, shape, and very substance of her body. As soft and flexible as your baby is, she nevertheless does store tension in the parts of her body that she is working to gain control of, as well as those parts ill



GETTING READY

Before beginning, do a few simple stretches to relax (neck rolls, shoulder rolls, arm stretches, lower back stretches).

Change into soft, comfortable, nonbinding clothes.

Use vegetable-based oil (baby oils are mineral based and should not be ingested, which they will be when oil gets on baby's hands).

Trim your nails; even though you will be using the pads of your fingers, not the tips, long fingernails may scratch your baby.

Choose a time not directly before or after your baby's meal.

Do not give your baby a massage if she is sick or has a fever. Infections can be spread through the body with massage.

Do not massage over areas of swelling (after a shot, e.g.).

Keep receiving blankets or cloth diapers handy for "accidents."

TEXT BY JEAN KUNHARDT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN DOLAN

Anyone can learn to do infant massage, but it's often especially rewarding for fathers. Those who don't get much opportunity for physical closeness with their newborns enjoy this chance to bond with their babies.

controlled by the more primitive reflexes. Massage can teach your baby to release these tensions: her tightly clenched fists, constantly working mouth, bent arms, and the upper spine and neck muscles needed to hold up her heavy head.

Equally important, massage will help you to understand and respond to your baby's nonverbal body cues and communications. Your baby will teach you what she does and doesn't like as you experiment with different strokes and pressures. If she scowls or starts to cry as you rub her belly or stroke her forehead, show her that you understand by changing the amount of pressure or by stopping and returning to a more acceptable step.

Dip your fingers in the oil and rub a small amount over your hands before you begin, and whenever they start to feel dry; the idea is to keep your hands lubricated enough that they don't pull and chafe on your baby's skin as you stroke, but not so greasy that you leave her slicked with oil.

Start each massage with your baby's legs and feet. This is a gentle and nonintrusive approach that most babies love. As with any new experience, your baby may not take to it immediately or may initially display a very short tolerance for it. Begin slowly. She will indicate when she is ready to stop. Each day you can lengthen the duration of the massage. If you have the time and inclination, you can eventually build a half-hour massage into her daily routine. But don't feel disheartened if your schedule won't permit this. Fit in a five-minute leg massage after her evening bath, or spend a few minutes before bedtime or nap time concentrating on your baby's feet.

Infant massage is a relaxing and bonding experience for both parent and baby. As you settle down in a warm and quiet room, the distractions and stresses of the day melt away. Eye to eye, skin to skin, you smile at one another, make faces, and echo each other's playful sounds. Your baby delights in feeling her chubby legs rubbed with oil; you, in the discovery of the velvety softness of her earlobe. Synchronized both physically and emotionally, you are sowing the seeds for a lifetime of closeness.

to begin 1. You will need a wide, sturdy bowl with room-temperature vegetable-based oil (avocado is particularly nonallergenic). Sit on the floor with your baby in front of you on a mat or rug covered with towels.



foot 2. Take your baby's right foot in your hand; with your thumb, trace dry circles all over the bottom of the foot. Take hold of each toe and individually rotate it, then give each toe a gentle tug.



chest 7. Using a three-part motion, start with your hands in prayer position over your baby's chest. Like flattening the pages of a book, stroke your hands down and outward in one smooth motion over the chest...

8. ...then stroke up and over the shoulders and down the baby's sides following the line of the rib cage. Repeat the chest massage, from prayer position to final rib-cage stroke (steps 7 and 8), three times.

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3. Holding the ankle steady in one hand, grasp the foot with the other hand and rotate it a few times in a clockwise direction. Then rotate it in the opposite direction.

4. Pressing gently with the ball of your thumb, make tiny circles all over the anklebone area.

leg 5. Hold baby's right ankle in your right hand. With a long open-palmed motion, stroke the side of the leg from buttocks to heel and back.

6. Encircle baby's thigh, and squeeze with small pulses (like milking a cow) down the leg to the ankle, then back up to the upper thigh, repeating this three times. Repeat steps 2 to 6 on the other foot and leg.



9. With an open hand, start at left shoulder and stroke in one long motion across baby's body, ending at the opposite hip, then follow the same line back up to the shoulder. Repeat three times and then reverse (right shoulder to left hip).

belly 10. With flattened palm, make clockwise circles on baby's abdomen. With the side of the hand as shown above, press from top of baby's abdomen down to the top of the genitals.

11. Follow that motion with the opposite hand, then repeat over and over in paddle-wheel fashion.

12. Hold baby's heels together and raise legs up as if diapering (this releases the muscles in the belly and allows the massage to go deeper). Using your right hand in the same motion as before, stroke abdomen from bottom of rib cage downward.

Don't be surprised if your baby makes **funny faces** when you massage her cheeks and forehead, and especially her jaw. New babies work so hard at sucking and crying that these facial muscles are often quite tense.

arm 13. Extend baby's right arm (if she is holding it in tightly, gentle shakes will help her to release it), and hold the wrist. With a flattened palm, stroke down from baby's shoulder to wrist and back up again.

14. Still holding the wrist, encircle the baby's upper arm, and squeeze with gentle pulses down the arm and back up.

hand 15. Grasp baby's hand and rotate her wrist a few times in a clockwise direction. Then rotate it in the opposite direction. Gently maneuver your thumb into her closed fist to open her hand.

16. Gently pull each finger and then trace tiny circles all over the palm with the ball of your thumb. Repeat steps 13 to 16 on the other arm and hand.



20. Find that jaw hinge, and trace tiny circles with your fingertips at this spot. (Start softly and increase pressure gradually. This is a particularly tension-filled spot for new babies.)

21. Hold each earlobe between thumb and forefinger, and trace tiny circles on the earlobes.

back 23. Flip your baby over. Babies often do not like this position as much, so put a toy or something intriguing in front of her to attract her attention. Now with all ten fingers, trace tiny circles all over back of head.

24. On either side of the spine, use your thumbs to trace tiny ever-widening circles on the neck.

head and face

17. (No oil is needed for baby's scalp.) With all ten fingers, trace tiny circles all over baby's scalp.

18. Using your thumbs or any two opposing fingers, trace the following paths on your baby's face (do each of these motions three times): the center of the forehead out to the temples; along the eyebrows to the temples...

19. ...under the eyes, from the nose out to the temples; down along the sides of the nose and out toward the ears.

20. Start in the center of your baby's chin and trace the line of the jaw, out toward the point where top and bottom jaw meet.



25. Continuing this circular motion, work down to the shoulders and the back all the way to the buttocks (avoid pressing down on the spine itself).

26. Alternating hands, make crisscrossing strokes over the back from one side of the body to the other, working your way down from the shoulders to the small of the back and over the buttocks.

27. End the massage with one long stroking motion down the back of the body all the way from head to toe and back up.

28. After a massage, your baby may fall into a peaceful sleep. Massage can also stimulate the appetite, so do not be surprised if your baby seems hungry sooner than usual.