

Baby's First Massage ¹

What Are the Benefits of Newborn Massage?

- assists with bonding through pleasurable experiences.
- teaches early infant communication so that the caregiver can understand and respond more appropriately, creating family harmony.
- increases circulation and assists in the newborn's healing process.
- promotes rest and relaxation, digestion, weight gain, and elimination.
- uses "cephalocaudal" strokes, which move from head to toe, from the center of the body out to the fingers or toes.
- protects newborns with underdeveloped nervous systems from compromise during the healing period through cephalocaudal stroking.

What Does Baby's First Massage Look Like?

- Set aside between 15 and 30 minutes for the massage, preferably immediately before an anticipated breastfeeding. If baby is bottle fed, wait to do massage for 30 minutes after a feeding. Massage can be done several times a day and is good before bedtime.
- Before you begin, washing your hands thoroughly. When using lotion or oil for the massage, avoid contaminating the cord or area immediately surrounding the cord.
- Review ways to comfort the newborn.
- Alternate massage sessions with your partner, one of you reading these instructions aloud while the other is massaging your newborn.

Newborn Massage Instructions

- Keep baby swaddled (loosely) so that they don't get cold and waste energy keeping their body heat up.
- If the baby refuses to look at you (gaze aversion) or two of the following signals, stop, comfort them and start again later.
 - arching of the back
 - splaying of the fingers (looks like they are holding up their hand to say stop)
 - the "I need help cry"
- Use a VERY small amount of oil or lotion, preferably unscented. Cold-pressed Safflower oil is best as it causes the baby to gain fat under the skin to increase weight.

¹ Taken from *Baby's First Massage* by Teresa Kirkpatrick Ramsey and adapted from a handout written by Kathleen Crouse, NCMT, New Castle, DE.

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Before You Begin: Your strokes should always go from head to toe, from the center of the body out to the fingers or toes. Once the massage begins, always keep one hand or the other in contact with the baby. Make sure your hands and the room are warm and that you are comfortable. Tell your baby "I'm going to give you a massage, are you ready?" and let them hear you rub your hands together as you warm a few drops of oil. Babies can learn these cues and will learn to anticipate this experience.

Throughout the massage, talk soothingly to your baby, telling him or her what you are about to do. If the baby gives any time out cues, stop and contain him or her in various ways and allow the baby to come back to a centered space before proceeding. If baby becomes overwhelmed twice in less than five minutes, stop the massage and wait a while to continue. Perhaps you might even wait until tomorrow. Good luck!

The Legs: With baby on its back, lay both hands alongside the babies face for a few seconds, this allows them to adjust to your touch. Unwrap one of the baby's legs, and remove the sock. Gently but firmly support the ankle and place the thumb of one hand on the sole of the foot. Use the other hand to rub gently from the hip to the ankle, using just enough pressure to make good contact, but not so much as to drag the skin. Repeat this stroke 3-4 times. Cover the leg with the blanket. Do this same procedure on the other leg.

The Abdomen: Uncover the abdomen. Warm a few drops of oil by rubbing your hands together. The abdominal stroke is called the "I Love U" stroke because you make the pattern of the first letter of each word. Begin on the baby's left side, stay below the ribs. Make a capital "I" stroking from the ribs to the groin. Then, make an upside down "L" to empty the transverse colon. Then make an upside down "U" to empty the entire large intestine. SEE THAT YOU ARE MOVING IN THE DIRECTION THAT THE HANDS OF A CLOCK MOVE. Repeat the entire sequence 2 -3 more times. This is a wonderful stroke. If a baby is gassy or constipated, this stroke will greatly assist the baby. Do this stroke sequence before each feeding to resolve these problems.

Use the tip of the finger or fingernail and very lightly, in a ticklish fashion, begin a clockwise, spiraling motion from the edge of the cord out to the edge of the abdomen. Move quickly. Pick up your finger and come back to the edge of the cord and begin spiraling out again. If the baby is constipated, it will require 5-6 minutes of this stroking to get the peristalsis moving. Move clockwise.

The Chest: Uncover the chest and remove the T-shirt, but cover the arms and legs. Warm a few drops of oil. Lay your hands on the chest and just be calm there for a moment. This is a sensitive area. With one hand remaining in place, move the other hand down the chest, over the nipple line down to the groin. If the baby takes sharp, deep inhalations, slow down the speed of the stroke. Repeat 3-4 times, then change hands. Always provide the containment, the security that the one hand held in place provides. Cover the chest.

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The Arms: Uncover one arm and warm a few drops of oil. Put firm pressure on the baby's palm with one thumb, then stroke from the shoulder to the wrist, rocking the hand back and forth as you move down the arm. Repeat 3-4 times, then cover the arm. Repeat this on the other arm. If the baby holds the arm in tightly to the chest, try asking the baby if you may have his/her arm. I can't explain why, but they usually do relax their arms. You can also try holding the arm slightly up by the hand with the tips of your fingers, and gently shake it.

The Back: Place the baby on his/her abdomen and remove the blanket from the back area, but keep the arms and legs covered. Warm a few drops of oil. Gently lay both hands on the back and let them rest there for a few moments. Keep one hand in place while you do these 2 strokes down the back to the diaper. Gently run your hands down the back. Repeat 3-4 times. Then, begin making little circles down the spinal erector muscles that are alongside the vertebrae. Repeat 3-4 times. If the baby arches, slow down the speed of movement. Change hands and repeat these strokes on the other side.

The Legs: Complete the massage by stroking the legs again using the same rotary movement, beginning at the hip and stroking down. Repeat 3-4 times on both legs.

