

## **BABY MASSAGE**

Massage for the baby begins before birth, with uterine contractions, which stimulate the baby's skin. This, in turn, activates the autonomic nervous system, sending messages to the respiratory system, signalling the baby's first task after birth: breathing. Since humans do not lick their newborns as other mammals do, the human, longer labour offers stimulation to the baby's organs. Babies born via C-section do not have the cutaneous stimulation of the birth canal and therefore benefit enormously from massage.

The skin is the largest sensory organ in the body. Touch is one of the primary senses as well as a primary need. Babies respond to the way they are touched and handled. Children deprived of physical contact generally suffer more from anxiety and related conditions.

Baby Massage is an extended form of touch which addresses this inherent need with the benefits extending beyond touch and a child's disposition.

### **Benefits of baby massage for the baby**

- Enhances all the characteristics of bonding with carer, babies thrive on this interaction.
- Strengthened immune system, increasing resistance to disease.
- Stimulates all body systems, eg respiratory, circulatory, nervous, digestive-relieving colic and wind.
- Reduces pain and tension by increasing endorphin output.
- Helps to develop body awareness, co-ordination, suppleness and alertness
- There is a faster weight gain therefore low birth-weight babies benefit from massage by an increase in appetite.
- Contentment, improved rest, relaxation and sleep.

### **Benefits of baby massage for the carer**

- Enhanced bonding with the baby
- Increased confidence in handling the baby, thus helping carers to be more proficient and capable in their nurturing abilities.
- Pleasure, joy, relaxation
- Greater understanding of baby's wants and needs, likes and dislikes
- permission to touch
- Mother benefits from massaging baby as prolactin secretion is enhanced, which is essential for milk production so breast feeding can be more successful.

### **Contraindications to Baby Massage**

- If baby has a high temperature
- If baby has any infectious illness e.g. chicken pox, gastro-enteritis
- If baby has an all-over itchy rash (if the rash is just in one place then avoid that particular area).
- Avoid areas of inflammation, wounds, boils, etc.

### **It is also best to avoid massage**

- Within 24 hours of vaccination
- After either a big feed or if the baby is very hungry.

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