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Childcare and children's health

An information sheet for parents

Baby Massage

All families spontaneously nurture their babies through touch. Parents pat or stroke babies when they are going to sleep, or give them a cuddle, a rub on the back or a gentle stroke on the face if a baby is upset.

A special form of touch which has been shown to be highly valuable is baby massage.

What baby massage does

Massage can have many benefits. For a baby experiencing stress, massage can be calming and assist them to relax. It can be also be particularly helpful for babies who are constipated, or are hard to settle at night. Studies have even found that regular massage helps premature babies to gain weight at a faster rate.

Above all, massage helps parents build closer relationship with their babies. It helps babies feel safe and loved, and helps parents and baby to learn to trust and have confidence in each other. Whether parents massage their babies or not, being touched and held and stroked is very important for a baby's emotional development.

When to massage

There are many opportunities for parents to touch and massage their babies in the course of the day. These include:

- when changing nappies
- after a bath
- at sleep time
- spontaneously when babies are being cuddled
- when sitting beside a baby on the mat on the floor

How to massage

Parents need to pay careful attention to their baby's response to massage, as not all children respond in the same way. Some babies are more resistant, or may prefer to be touched on some areas but show dislike of others. These preferences must be respected. However, most babies enjoy being touched or massaged.

It is not necessary to put anything on the baby's skin prior to a massage, although a pure baby oil, lotion or powder can be used.

Websites with photos illustrating massage techniques for use with babies.

<http://www.babycentre.co.uk/general/3835.html>

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=301&id=1883>

Books

Amelia D. Auckett (2003). *Baby Massage: Parent-Child Bonding Through Touch.*

Peter Walker (2002). *The Practical Art of Baby Massage.*

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded for printing from the Early Childhood Connections website.

www.ecconnections.com.au



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