

Baby Massage

A Guide for Parents

Gently stroking your baby can be soothing and relaxing for you both. It may help you to develop your own special way of touching your baby, to show your love and to calm and comfort them.

The physiotherapist and the nurse looking after your baby can give you more information on how and when to massage your baby. Ask if you are interested – we would be pleased to help you get started.

- Massage should be carried out in a relaxed atmosphere
- Make sure you are comfortable – either sitting with your baby on your lap, or if your baby is in an incubator standing or sitting on a high chair
- If your baby can come out onto your lap, use a clean sheet or towel to protect your lap from the massage oil
- Make the areas as quiet, warm and comfortable as possible so that both you and your baby can relax
- Have a blanket to hand to keep the parts of your baby that you are not massaging warm
- Before starting massage with oil, your baby's skin must be tested the day before to make sure there is no reaction
- Discuss with the nurse looking after your baby when the best time to massage would be. It is important to wait at least 45 minutes after a feed and to make sure that your baby can have an undisturbed rest time following the massage
- Some babies will only tolerate a very small amount of massage to begin with. The nurse looking after your baby can give you some guidelines on how much to try at first
- Use slow, rhythmical strokes with firm but gentle pressure. Light fast strokes will waken your baby up rather than helping to relax and soothe them
- Repeat each stroke as many times as you feel is right- normally about 3-5 times
- Some areas will be particularly sensitive. If your baby fusses, try just resting your hands on the sensitive area followed by very slow, firm but gentle rhythmical strokes

Getting Started

Have everything ready, as above.

Make sure your hands are clean and then rub some oil. We use organic sunflower oil but if you have an oil you would like to use please ask the nurse looking after your baby. Rub the oil in your hands to warm both it and your hands. Relax yourself – try taking some slow deep breaths, clearing your mind of everything but your baby and you and shrug your shoulder and neck to loosen your muscles. The more relaxed you are the more relaxing your baby will find the massage.

Now you are ready!

Always start the massage in the same way e.g. “comfort” position – 1 hand cupped over head, the other resting gently on the chest or bottom. Use words as well, such as “it’s massage time.” In this way your baby may learn to recognise that massage is to follow. You may find that certain strokes tend to make your baby fuss, particularly when you are both getting used to massage. The “comfort” position may help your baby to relax and settle.

The order that follows is a guide only

Any part may be massaged next. The legs are often least sensitive and may be best to start with. If you wish to start on the head, body or arms, do whatever you are happiest with.

1. **Leg:** use hand over hand to “milk” the leg from thigh to toes
 - Stroke the top of the foot and circle around each ankle
 - Stroke from the foot down to your baby’s bottom
2. **Arm:** use hand over hand to “milk” the arm from shoulder to fingers
 - Stroke over the palm of the hand and straighten out the fingers
 - Curl and straighten each joint of the fingers individually
 - Stroke the top of the hand and circle around the wrist
 - Stroke from the hand to your baby’s shoulder
3. **Chest:** use hand over hand to stroke diagonally from shoulder to side of the ribcage (like a saltire)
 - Stroke hand over hand down your baby’s tummy
 - Stroke hand over hand in a clockwise circle on your baby’s tummy
 - The tummy is sensitive and your baby may need to adjust to being stroked here. Just resting the hands on the tummy may help them to relax.
 - If your baby is ‘colicky’ or windy, there are more strokes that may help – please ask the Physiotherapist

4. **Back:** stroke hand over hand down your baby's back, include the bottom if possible
 - Circle each spinous process of the backbone
 - Stroke hand over hand across your baby's back
5. **Face*:** fingertips should be used and should not be too oily when stroking the face
 - Circle the temples
 - Stroke in the heart shape from bridge of nose up around the eyebrows, and follow the jaw line to the chin
 - Stroke from the bridge of the nose along the cheekbones to the ears
 - Circle around the mouth
 - Brush lightly from base of nose to lip
 - From chin to lower lip
6. Finish with "comfort" position

Your baby should be peaceful and relaxed and hopefully you will be too!! Leave your baby undisturbed, back in bed, for as long as possible

***The above strokes are a guide only, please use the massage in the way you are most comfortable**

Royal Hospital for Children and Young People
50 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh EH16 4TJ
Tel.: **0131 536 1000**

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NHS Lothian Paediatric Physiotherapy Services