

We Skoolhouse



BABY MASSAGE GUIDE





BABY MASSAGE

The simple touch of a caregiver's hand offers immediate comfort and security to your baby. A wonderful way to expand upon your infant's skin-to-skin experiences is through daily massages. Not only does massaging your baby enhances the caregiver and baby bond, but also provides a plethora of other benefits, including improved cognition, immune health, emotional wellbeing, and speech development.

BENEFITS

IMPROVED COGNITION:

Believe it or not, a simple massage can contribute to increased cognition. Babies rely heavily on touch and sensation to learn, grow, and understand the world around them. The experience of touch instantly boosts brain activity and the formation of new synapses (connection pathways in the brain). Daily massages will also contribute to your baby's awareness and ability to focus, as they concentrate and "track" your actions, feeling you caress the different parts of their body.

SUPPORTS IMMUNE SYSTEM AND DIGESTION:

Our largest organ is our skin (integumentary system). Therefore, what our skin is exposed to affects the internal functions of our body. By massaging over particular areas, such as the vagus nerve that connects and stimulates the brain and gut, you can support your baby's ability to absorb nutrients. Because the immune system is housed in the gut, this stimulation may also contribute to a decrease in infection rates and severity.

You may also incorporate a small amount of baby-safe essential oils that can support various areas of health and wellness.

Massaging your baby's stomach may also relieve common gas pains and constipation babies often experience, as the external movements may help move around trapped air bubbles inside your baby's digestive tract.



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING:

The first year of life is when your child needs your touch and close proximity the most. Your presence, physical touch, and skin-to-skin sessions provide your baby with a sense of security that sets the foundation of their social and emotional wellbeing.

And just like children and adults, babies can feel stress, too. Massages are a wonderful way to relax and relieve stress for babies of any and every age. Consider a massage close to a baby's nap or nighttime sleep to support a deeper rest session.



PROMOTES SPEECH DEVELOPMENT:

Daily massages also offer a wonderful opportunity to enhance speech development in your baby. Receptively, your infant will enjoy your descriptive language as you narrate your actions. For example, you may say something like "Now I'm going to massage your leg. I'm moving my fingers around and around. How does it feel?"

After asking "how does it feel?" pause and give your baby an opportunity to respond. Even if they don't have language yet, they are internalizing conversational cues and eventually will respond with a sound or coo. These sounds, coos, and consonant clusters are fundamental sounds that contribute to expressive language.



MATERIALS:

Oil or Baby Lotion and a Towel

DIRECTIONS:

- Ensure the room you will massage your baby in is warm and comfortable, as you will be removing their clothes (leaving only the diaper).
- Gently place your baby down on a soft yet firm surface, such as your bed, changing table, etc. and apply a small amount of oil or lotion to your hands. Rub the liquid into your hands to help disperse it, while also warming your hands up before massaging your baby.
- Inform your baby that you will be massaging them now, starting from their feet. They will begin to connect the word “massage” to the experience, which contributes to a sense of predictability.



- Begin at the feet, rubbing the heel, arch, and sole in circular motions. Apply gentle pressure, and read your baby's cues. If they seem uncomfortable, try reducing the pressure a bit. If they're still uncomfortable, revisit at another time.
- After the bottom of the foot is massaged, you may begin working your way up to the top of the foot, ankle, calf, and thigh. Keep massaging your baby with gentle, circular motions. You may spend anywhere from 30 seconds to one minute on each body part, but of course, you can spend less or more depending on your baby's response. Repeat the same process for the other leg.
- When you get to your baby's stomach, gently massage around the belly button in a clockwise motion. Try to avoid massaging your baby's belly in an upward motion as it can move gas bubbles up instead of downward.
- As you approach your baby's shoulders, use both hands to rub in an upwards motion. You can then rub the shoulders with both hands in circular motions.



- Pick an arm to then massage, working your way down to the hand, utilizing circular motions as you go. Repeat the same for the other arm.
- After both arms are done, you'll begin to massage the baby's face & ears in soft, circular motions. After about 30 seconds, turn your baby over onto their stomach for a quick back rub. Inform your baby you will be turning them over on their belly before doing so (e.g. "Now that I'm done massaging your ears, I'm going to turn you over onto your belly now, so I can massage your back. After I massage your back, we'll be all done.").
- With the same pressure and circular motions, begin rubbing your baby's back. This is also a great way to get some added tummy time in, which helps to increase head, neck, and trunk strength. Stay with this for as long as your baby is comfortable.
- When you're finished, announce to your baby "all done!" Utilize the towel to clean off any excess oil, then pick up your baby and give a cuddle—**we hope you both enjoyed the massage session!**