

Baby Massage - the underlying language of comfort.

Before babies are able to understand language, we often communicate and comfort them through touch. You know what happens: The minute you put your baby down, they cry. Pick them up and, presto –they're serene and smiley again. so, if just holding your baby can be so soothing, imagine how they'll benefit from a full-body massage? In fact, studies have shown that massaging an infant can reduce crying and fussiness, help your baby to sleep more peacefully, and alleviate common wail-inducers like constipation and colic (more benefits below)!

Baby and infant massage are not new. In fact, baby massage has quite a history. Evidence of the earliest infant massage dates back to ancient India. Even then, massage was more than 'just a form of relaxation' –they were incorporated into Indian Medicine as a way to enhance circulation, get rid of toxins, improve digestive function, and boost overall well-being.

Newborns have a well-developed sense of touch when they are born and our skin is our largest organ. Nurturing touch begins with skin-to-skin as soon as possible after birth. This involves placing your baby on your chest to facilitate close contact between you and your baby.

While there are many books and videos available on infant massage, learning along with other parents from a Certified Infant Massage Instructor (CIMI) is a more hands-on, interactive and personal experience. During your baby massage classes, you will also benefit from the interaction, knowledge and experience of other parents.

Baby massage is the perfect way to encourage interaction and communication to develop parent-baby bonding. Baby massage provides an opportunity for eye-to-eye contact, for baby to feel your touch, hear your voice, smell your scent and gives you time to get to know and understand them. This will allow you to respond to their needs more quickly, making baby feel secure and loved, and parents more confident in their abilities.

In addition, the loving gaze between a parent and baby, and the simple connection through touch releases the hormones Oxytocin and Serotonin. Both Oxytocin (known as the love hormone) and Serotonin help you to feel good, be more relaxed and can act as an antidote to depressive feelings. Oxytocin also plays a crucial role in bonding and social interaction helping us to feel more connected to each other. It is why skin to skin contact is encouraged in the early days of a newborn's life and why we cuddle or instinctively touch to reassure others.

Giving your infant regular massages is good for his emotional well-being. Affectionate touch and rhythmic movement are among the most powerful forms of communication between your baby and you, so they're great ways for you to bond. It's easy to feel helpless with a newborn, baby massage will help you learn how to read your baby's signals and respond better to their unique needs.

Over 100 studies confirm the wide range of massage benefits for common maladies from gas to colic to sleeping problems both research and anecdotal evidence from families have shown that there are many ways that babies and families may benefit from infant massage.



Interaction during infant massage may include:

- Promotion of bonding and secure attachment
- Verbal/non-verbal communication
- Development of trust and confidence
- Use of all the senses
- Feelings of love, respect, and being valued

Each massage may stimulate:

- Circulatory and digestive systems
- Hormonal and immune systems
- Coordination and balance
- Learning and concentration
- Muscular development and growth
- Mind and body awareness
- Relaxation (for both you and your little one)
- Improves sensitivity to touch - great for baby's that have had any interventions or been in SCBU
- Emotional and social development

Parents may find that baby and infant massage helps relieve:

- Gas and colic
- Constipation and elimination
- Growing pains and muscular tension
- Teething discomfort
- Cramps
- Postnatal Depression by giving nurturing touch and quality time with your baby

Massage promotes relaxation which may be shown through:

- Improved sleep patterns
- Increased flexibility and muscle tone
- Regulation of behavioural states
- Being calm and being able to calm themselves
- Reduction in stress hormones

Benefits for Mums and Dads who have Postnatal Depression and/or postnatal anxiety:

PND affects many Mums and Dads. New parents feel like they should be instantly in love with their newborn and be relishing every second. But the reality is that this just isn't the case for many, especially when suffering from PND and anxiety. Suffering from PND is challenging for parents as it often has a negative effect on communication with their baby, making bonding difficult. Creating a strong attachment is important for baby's development. Research shows that when treating PND, it is important to focus on parent-infant interaction and not just depression.

Baby massage can help PND on several levels. Research has been carried out to assess the impact of baby massage on parents suffering with PND. It shows that after attending baby massage classes, depression and anxiety was reduced, there were fewer sleep problems in the infants, and the quality of interactions between mother and child was improved.



When can I start baby massage?

There are no set guidelines regarding the minimum age for when to start baby massage. Although nurturing touch can be given from birth, some babies may find formal, structured massage too stimulating in the very early weeks.

When it comes to baby massage classes, it can be a juggle for parents to make it to a class on time or consistently with a newborn. As a result, many parents and instructors prefer to wait until babies are about six weeks old when their routine is more settled and their behaviour is sometimes more predictable.

Hawke's Bay Baby Massage Classes:

Bellies to Babies Antenatal & Postnatal Classes

2087 Pakowhai Rd, Hawke's Bay

022 637 0624

<https://www.hbantenatal-classes.co.nz/postnatalclasses>

