Enjoy
BABY MASSAGE

Written by Helen Carr, an experienced Midwife and Baby Massage Instructor.

An informative and easy to follow guide aimed at anyone interested in baby massage.
INTRODUCTION

Baby massage provides a special time for you and your baby to share.
As a mum of three, I believe that massage is a life skill,
a gift to cherish and helps you to create a
life long bond with your baby.
As your child grows older you may find he/she will begin to massage you!

Whilst working as a midwife I gained a BA(Hons) in Health Studies.
As part of my degree course I researched and devised a teaching pack for
midwives and health professionals on baby massage.
that has formed the grounding for this guide.

The aim of this guide is to encourage families to enjoy baby massage.
You can learn baby massage before your baby is born by practising
on a doll or teddy bear.
The guide will enable you to massage your baby confidently.
Massaging your tummy, singing and talking to your baby
before birth is the beginning of baby massage
and the start of your special journey.

When your baby is new born, start with gentle stroking movements.
As your baby and your confidence grows, gradually include new
movements using the routine to guide you.
These step by step instructions will provide you with necessary skills
to form a strong physical, emotional and spiritual
attachment with your baby...ENJOY.
SPECIAL THANKS

to the beautiful model Erin Longworth, who shows how it should be done and her parents Joanne and Neil for allowing Helen to share in that special time.
The most important thing about baby massage is that you and your baby enjoy it. Baby massage is a very special way of spending precious and fulfilling time together.

The aim of this booklet is to provide you with information on

The benefits of baby massage. 1
Checklist for safe baby massage. 2
What to use on your baby’s skin. 3-4
How to prepare for baby massage. 5
Baby massage routine. 6
Leg massage 7-8
Foot massage 9-10
Tummy massage 11-12
Chest & arm massage 13-14
Back massage 15-16
THE BENEFITS OF BABY MASSAGE

There are many research articles published on baby massage and the benefits are widely accepted (further reading is suggested at the end of the guide). Some of the physical and psychological benefits are described below.

**Physical benefits of baby massage include :-**
- Good for condition of the skin.
- Stimulates the circulation, encouraging blood supply to the muscles and tissue.
- Improves digestion and can prevent/help with wind, colic and constipation.
- Encourages weight gain.
- Stimulates endorphins – the body’s natural pain killers.
- Encourages joint mobility and flexibility.
- Usually calming and relaxing.
- Improves sleep patterns.

**Psychological benefits of baby massage include :-**

**Bonding**
Bonding has been defined as the strong physical, emotional and spiritual attachment, which can develop between people of any age.
Baby massage is both good for your baby and the person performing the massage.

**Family involvement**
All family members can participate in baby massage, creating that special involvement with your baby and encouraging a closer family unit.
Involving siblings (either massaging the baby or a doll) also helps them adjust.
For breast feeding mums - someone else massaging your baby provides you with a little time-out.

**‘Allows’ Touch**
It has been demonstrated that in our society there are many factors which inhibit physical contact between parents and their baby. Baby massage provides the ‘permission to touch’.

**Promotes confidence**
Baby massage helps you to gain confidence in holding, handling and caring for your baby.
It can empower and enables you to communicate well with your baby.
Touch is the basic and simplest form of communication.

**Soothing and calming**
It can help with a fretful or crying baby especially when the baby is used to massage.
Stroking and soothing movements can also help if your baby is teething or poorly.
CHECKLIST FOR SAFE BABY MASSAGE

Baby massage is a very safe method of care but check the list below before you start.
If unsure seek advice from your midwife, health visitor, doctor or a qualified baby massage instructor.

1. Is your baby well?
If your baby is poorly, particularly if he/she has a high temperature, your baby’s body is working hard and your baby needs to rest.
Seek professional advice if your baby is unwell.
Gentle stroking and soothing movements can be calming and relaxing for your baby but do not perform a full massage routine.

2. Has your baby had a recent immunisation?
Avoid baby massage for 48 hours after the immunisation in case your baby develops a temperature.
Again the stroking, soothing movements can be calming and relaxing.
If your baby appears well after 48 hours, you can massage but be very gentle over the injection site for about a week.

3. Has your baby got a rash/skin problem?
Babies (especially when little) have sensitive skin and are prone to slight rashes, spots and dry skin patches.
If you are at all concerned about the condition of your baby’s skin, consult with your GP, midwife or health visitor before using a massage medium.
Skin infections are not common but need ruling out.
If your baby has a skin infection it is important not to massage until fully treated, to prevent spreading the condition.
If your baby has a skin condition (e.g. eczema) and you are prescribed a cream or lotion, use this as your massage medium with the exception of steroid creams.
Your health professional will advise you on the use of steroid creams.

You know your baby best, but it is advisable...
Not to wake your baby for a massage.
Not to massage your baby against his/her will.
Not to force any movements.
To stop if your baby becomes upset. Settle him/her and return to the massage if/when your baby is ready and happy.
To wait for about an hour after a feed to allow for digestion.
(A stimulating massage just after a feed can make your baby vomit.)
MASSAGE MEDIUMS

A massage medium can be an oil, cream or lotion used to lubricate the skin for massage, allowing for a smooth flow of movement.

**Newborn Baby**

At birth, the top layer of your baby’s skin is very thin and easily damaged. Over the first month (or longer if your baby was premature), your baby’s skin matures and develops its own natural protective barrier.

Vernix (the white sticky substance that covers your baby’s skin in the womb) should always be left to absorb naturally. This is a natural moisturiser and protects against infection in the next few days.

It is best to avoid bathing your baby in the first few days. For at least the first month it is best to bathe your baby with plain water only. If you need to, you can also use some mild, non-perfumed soap. Avoid skin lotions, medicated wipes, or adding cleansers to your baby’s bath water.

Premature babies skin is even more delicate; neonatal staff will advise you on skin care. Avoid using any oils, creams or lotions until your baby is at least 1 month old.

**Introduction of a massage medium when your baby is older**

Choosing a massage medium is entirely down to personal choice; most people find oil the easiest medium to work with. It is advisable to apply the chosen medium to a small area of your baby’s skin, a few hours prior to applying over the whole body, to ensure it is suitable for your baby.

Cold pressed vegetable or fruit oils are the most suitable to use and are cheap and easy to obtain. Examples are:

- **Rapeseed oil**
  Obtained from the plant it is a cold pressed oil that is a deep yellow colour and easy to use. It contains Vitamin E and helps to soften and nourish the skin.

- **Grapeseed oil**
  As a fruit oil it is very light and easy to use. It leaves the skin with a smooth satin finish without being greasy.

- **Calendula oil**
  A more specialist oil which is a cold pressed oil that has had marigolds steeped in it. The marigolds’ properties are very good for dry cracked or sore skin and help with healing and reduce inflammation. As a more specialised oil it is more expensive than the ones described above.
Avoid buying oils used for cooking as they are highly refined. The refining process frequently involves the use of high temperatures and chemicals which can alter the natural properties and character of the oil. This makes the oil unsuitable for massage purposes.

Commercial baby products e.g. baby oils or baby massage creams are also suitable to use. They make the baby smell nice but the perfumes added can irritate some babies with sensitive skin.

Alternatives to oils are creams or lotions. It is better to use an un-perfumed base cream or base lotion made from pure, natural plant products. More specialist creams can also be helpful for certain babies.

If your baby has a skin condition (e.g. eczema) it is recommended that the cream prescribed or advised by your GP, midwife or health visitor is used as the massage medium, with the exception of steroid creams.

Massage mediums can be obtained from a chemist or health food shop. If you require any advice please speak to your midwife, health visitor or GP.
PREPARATION FOR BABY MASSAGE

It helps to prepare before you start to massage your baby. If possible ensure that...The Time is Right.

BABY
Choose a time when your baby is content, when he/she is not tired, hungry, just had a feed or fretful.

YOU
Ensure you have enough time and are not tired or in a hurry.
The room is warm and draught free.
Try to remain undisturbed (e.g. turn the phone off).
Remove jewellery and keep nails short to avoid scratching.
Your hands are clean and warm.

WHERE
The safest place to massage your baby is on a towel on the floor where you know your baby is safe and cannot fall. If it is easier you could place your baby on the bed or changing area but ensure your baby is not left unattended at any time.

YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED
Clean towel. Massage medium (i.e. oil, cream or lotion).
Clean nappy and clothing for after the massage.
Cotton wool and water or wipes for any accidents!

ONLY UNDRESS YOUR BABY WHEN YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN.
BABY MASSAGE ROUTINE

This routine is provided as a guide. It is helpful to have a routine to follow when you first start baby massage but it is not essential. It does not matter if you miss things out or add movements in. The most important thing is that you both enjoy the massage.

It is both relaxing for your baby and the person performing the massage. It is lovely to sing to your baby and as he/she gets older incorporate games - Make it fun!

Initially start with gentle stroking movements. As your confidence and your baby grows, include new movements, using the routine to guide you.

Most babies will initially tolerate about 5 minutes before they become restless; this is perfectly normal - build up slowly.

You will find that your baby enjoys certain movements more than others. If you get to a movement your baby does not like, go back to a movement he/she enjoys. If your baby becomes upset, stop, comfort your baby and continue if appropriate.

If massaged regularly you will find your baby will soon become used to the routine.

Baby massage is usually calming and relaxing for most babies and the routine is, therefore, better performed at night before bed. For this reason a lot of parents like to include baby massage as part of a bed time routine. Again it is a personal choice and has to be the right time for you both....ENJOY

The following pages illustrate a baby massage routine from start to finish. You can make the routine longer or shorter depending on how much time you have and what mood your baby is in.

ENSURE YOU ARE SITTING COMFORTABLY AND RELAXED.
Most babies enjoy having their legs massaged. The movements are good for your baby’s circulation, muscle tone and skin condition.

1. **STROKING** - to apply oil or cream, stroke down both legs

2. **MILKING** - ‘milk’ hand over hand by gently drawing the leg through your hands, repeat on the other leg.

3. **CALF CIRCLE** - with two fingers circle up the inner calf from ankle to knee and glide back down, repeat on the other leg.

4. **LOWER LEG CIRCLE** - with thumbs circle up either side of the shin bone from ankle to knee and glide back down, repeat on other leg.

5. **INNER THIGH** - gently abduct the hip and leg up and outwards (do not force any movements), massage inner thigh, gently shake leg down, repeat on other leg.

6. **HIP** - gently bend knee up and onto tummy, massage hip area, gently shake leg down, stroking as No:1, repeat on other leg.
FROG - gently abduct hips and legs outwards and massage down the legs.

FEET CLAPPING - holding feet clap together, rocking up and down.

ROCKING - gently rock legs side to side, from one side right across to the other.

LOWER BACK - slightly raise legs and massage base of the back, shake legs down.

Repeat No:1 - Stroking
Again most babies enjoy having their feet massaged but some babies who are not used to massage may start to get fed up at his stage. Don’t worry, this is normal. Try to massage your baby each day and you will find he/she will become used to the routine and you will both enjoy the session.

Go at your own pace and listen to your baby. Stop if he/she becomes fretful, then go back to a part of the massage your baby liked or just cuddle him/her.

1. **STROKING** - stroke the foot hand over hand.
2. **TOP** - finger circle over the top of the foot.
3. **ANKLE** - finger circle around both sides of the ankle.
SOLE - finger circle over the sole of the foot.

TOES - roll and pull each toe. As your baby gets older you can play ‘This little piggy’.

TOPS - massage between and the tops of the toes.

Repeat No:1 - Stroking
HAND PLACE - gently place your hand on the tummy so your baby adjusts to the warm weight of your hand.

LARGE CIRCLE - continue to circle clockwise but make a larger circle with pads of your fingers around sides of tummy and under rib cage.

SMALL CIRCLE - gently circle with fingers clockwise around your baby’s navel.

SLIDE - using your left hand slide across your baby’s tummy and glide back.

The tummy massage can be particularly useful for babies with wind, colic or constipation or to help prevent these conditions. If your baby does suffer from any of these conditions it is advisable to perform this massage when your baby is happy and comfortable.

(e.g. In the morning when changing your baby’s nappy)

Your baby will not enjoy this massage if he/she is unhappy or in pain.

Apply more oil/cream to your hands.
I LOVE YOU - a deeper massage for babies with wind, colic or constipation.

**SIDES**...firmly stroke inwards and downwards.

**LOVE**...firmly stroke from opposite corner across and down tracing the shape of an ’L’ for LOVE. This will encourage the bowel contents across the Transverse Colon and down.

**YOU**...firmly stroke from the right lower side of your baby’s tummy up, under the ribs, across and down tracing the shape of a ‘U’ for YOU. This will encourage the bowel contents up the Ascending Colon, across and down.

**I**...firmly stroke down your baby’s tummy from under the ribs tracing the letter ‘I’. This will encourage contents of the Descending Colon downwards.

Repeat No:3 - Large Circle
CHEST & ARMS

Apply more oil/cream to your hands.
The chest and arm massage is good for opening out the rib cage and chest capacity and therefore for the lung capacity.

If your baby is snuffy or has had a cold the ‘Pitter Patter’ movement can be performed more firmly to stimulate and dislodge any mucous. Again it is fun to incorporate games like Wind the Bobbin or Wheels on the Bus.

1. SHOULDERS - glide up the chest and over the shoulders.
2. ARMS DOWN - glide up the chest over the shoulders and down the arms.
3. ARMS OUT - glide up the chest over the shoulders and take the arms out to the sides.
4. ARMS UP - glide up the chest, over the shoulders and take the arms above the head.
5. PITTER PATTER - using finger tips ‘pitter patter rain drops’ over whole of your baby’s rib cage.
MILKING - ‘milk’ hand over hand by gently drawing the arm through your hands, repeat on the other arm.

HANDS - using your thumbs, circle palms of your baby’s hands.

CLAPPING - clap hands together

SO BIG - take arms up and out... saying “SO BIG”.

WIND THE BOBBIN or WHEELS ON THE BUS - winding hands round and round.

Repeat No:2 - Arms Down
BACK

Turn your baby over and place on his/her tummy with the arms in front. Little babies will automatically turn their heads to the side while older babies will lift their upper body up. It is good to place your baby on his/her tummy to encourage upper body strength and prepare for crawling. Often babies with tummy ache like the pressure on their tummy. Try lying your baby on his/her tummy across your knees and back patting. ‘Tummy Time’ is good but NEVER put your baby on his/her tummy to sleep. Apply more oil/cream to your hands.

1. STROKING - hand over hand stroke down your baby’s back
2. PITTERMATTER - using finger tips ‘pitter patter rain drops’ over whole of the rib cage.
3. BASE - circular massage base of spine with finger tips or heal of your hand.
4. MILKING - milk down one leg and repeat on the other.
TOP TO TOE - using finger tips stroke your baby from top of the head to bottom of feet.

FEET - thumb circle soles of the feet.

HIP - gently bend heel of foot onto buttock and then massage the hip.

LOVELY!
The routine shown is intended as a guide. It can be adapted to suite you and your baby’s needs. Some days you may want to lengthen or shorten the session depending on how much time you have and what mood your baby is in. You will find as your baby grows you will adapt and work with the routine to meet your changing needs.

The main aim is to Enjoy your baby...Enjoy your special time together.
Suggested Further Reading

Peter Walker
The Practical Art of Baby Massage.
Carroll & Brown Publishers Ltd.
ISNB: 1-903258-10-3

Dr Alan Heath & Nicki Bainbridge
Baby Massage. The Calming Power of Touch.
Dorling Kindersley.
ISNB: 0-17513-0843-9

Helen McGuinness
Hodder & Stoughton
ISNB: 0-340-86928-3

Fredrick Leboyer
The Traditional Art of Baby Massage.
Newmarket Press
ISNB: 1-5570-314-0

Dr Sally Ward
Baby Talk.
Random House Group Ltd.
ISNB: 1-874353-02-6

Research Articles
As mentioned earlier there are numerous research articles published on baby massage. Many can be found by accessing PubMed library (a free database accessing the MEDLINE database of citations, abstracts and some full text articles on life sciences and biomedical topics). The Cochrane library (an independent collaboration producing best available evidence for health care decision making) provided a systematic review of infant massage studies in 2006. The review – ‘Massage intervention for promoting mental and physical health in infants aged under 6 months’, was published by Warwick Medical School, university of Warwick, UK, by Angela Underdown, Barlow J, Chung V, Stewart-Brown S. It concluded that there was evidence of the benefits of infant massage on mother-infant interaction, sleeping and crying, and on hormonal influencing stress levels. This article abstract can be seen on PubMed by searching – ‘Infant massage. A Underdown’
When no one’s looking Erin does it herself!