Why

The research is clear; touch positively influences health in many ways. Enhancing sleep, immunity and digestion are on the top of the list for many new parents. The bonding which occurs with massage is a positive contribution to any family and from there to the well being of our community and our world.

Besides its impact on bonding, improved immune function and aiding digestion, massage has been shown to promote weight gain, enhance parental cue reading skills, and teach healthy touch. There also is an integrating effect on the mind body connection which helps to enhance body organization including proprioception, dexterity, muscle tone and balance. Massage can also help to resolve many physical challenges associated with position in utero or birth related issues. Many new parents come to massage for treatment. Massage is best known for its ability to relax and soothe, in part by decreasing stress hormones (i.e. cortisol) and increasing nurturing hormones (i.e. oxytocin). Massage can also help resolve time apart.

Touch helps babies make the connections that help them grow.

When parents massage their infants, confidence in their parenting skills increases. Fathers who might feel left out of the bonding that occurs between mother and baby can create a special connection by giving their babies a gentle massage.

“Health experts have found that babies who are massaged are more alert when awake and are easier to soothe. Massage therapy promotes parent-child bonding, helps infants to relax and cry less, and aids in establishing good sleep patterns.” (Children’s Hospital/ Philadelphia- 2008) For more information about touch research, please go to www6.miami.edu-touch-research/InfantMassage.html

When

The best time to massage your baby is when you have something in your cup to offer. For busy new parents, these times may not occur often so try not to expect more than an occasional massage time to appear in the early weeks.

It’s truly never too early or too late to begin learning massage.

Parents often begin by offering massage following an evening bath or evening routine, with the hope of helping their baby to sleep. Sometimes what occurs is that baby does not get drowsy, but rather more alert. Each baby and each day will be somewhat different.

If you choose to massage in the morning or midday, night time sleep can still be enhanced in the same way that our daily exercise will enhance our night time sleep. So if you find that you can’t help your
baby to sleep with massage, know that you are impacting your baby’s sleep whenever you massage them.

A baby who needs to eat or is nearly asleep, will not be receptive to massage, just like us.

**Cautions**

Avoid abdominal massage directly after eating as it isn’t comfortable and may increase spitting up.

Don’t practice new skills during the massage if your intention is to help your baby to sleep- it’s too stimulating.

Avoid a full body massage if you feel that your baby may be coming down with a cold or a virus. A massage may increase symptoms slightly by increasing their metabolism. Reflexive massage (ears, hands or feet) is a great choice during illness- or anytime.

Keep in mind that some of the cranial bones are still in pieces and therefore the head is always treated gently with light touch only, particularly at the base of the occipital bone where the neck muscles attach to the cranium.

Avoid direct pressure on bones simply because it doesn’t feel good. Use your thenar pad (below thumb) directly on bones such as the spine and sacrum.

The depth of touch during the massage is light and somewhat strong, communicating safety and confidence. Touch that is too light may feel ticklish, annoying or unsafe. Infant massage engages the tissue at a minimum depth and is never a “deep tissue” massage. The arm massage you receive in class illustrates the depth difference for your baby.

Lotions and oils create an immediate cooling effect on the skin with air contact. Provide a slightly warmer than usual space for your massage. Many forms of massage may be done with clothing on if needed.

**Lotions and oils**

Before you start your massage, place a small amount of the massage lotion or oil you plan to use on the top of your baby’s foot, to make sure there is no skin reaction. If a rash occurs later, a simple bath may be all that is needed. Consult your health care provider with any further questions.

The type of lotion or oil you use is a personal choice. Bonding does involve the smell of your baby and your baby smelling you....and for that reason, you may want to choose something unscented. Many parents use their favorite scented oil or lotion, or use olive oil from the kitchen -and enjoy ‘unscented’ when it isn’t massage time. Make sure that whatever you use is safe to taste, and does not produce a rash.

My favorite massage oils are made by HelloMellow. They are very pure products, with very light and satisfying scents. You can get some of this wonderful oil at Whole Foods, PCC or online @ www.hellomellow.com

**How to begin**

First check your hands for rough nails etc, remove jewelry.
You may want to warm your hands under warm water.

Provide a warm and comfortable environment with soft lighting. Bright ceiling lights can be stimulating and distracting. Cold in any form is not compatible with infant massage.

Consider playing your favorite soft music and scenting the room with a favorite scent. Lavender in water over a candle creates a relaxing aroma. My two favorite relaxation aromas are cypress and lavender. These essences are available at PCC and your local massage supply store.

Have a towel or any easily washable soft surface to lay your baby on. When you are ready to begin, place your baby in front of you and bring them as close to you as possible. Many little ones will prefer an in-arms massage at first.

Begin with a touch connection with your child and take a few deep breaths.

As you begin, make sure that you are physically comfortable. Your relaxed breathing and comfortable body position will enhance the relaxation of the massage.

Develop a permission ritual, which is the beginning of teaching healthy touch. The ritual I learned from Vimala McClure's work is to use the noise of the lotion sloshing between your hands while posing the question; “massage?”

Begin with 5 or 10 minutes and decide together how long to continue. You can’t touch your baby too much. If they stop fussing when touch stops, this is a “no” to touch – for now.

Nothing should be unwelcome or uncomfortable during your baby’s massage. You can trust them to tell you of any objections, and when they are done with the massage.

Some infants may enjoy a pacifier during massage. This can create a grounding effect which allows them to focus on your touch more easily.

Always look for their permission when you begin something new. They will tell you.

Match your massage speed and strength to your baby. Newborns need the slowest and the most gentle of strokes. The speed of the strokes for them is at half the speed you’ll use when your baby is 3-6 months old.

Practice being wholly present to your baby by maintaining eye contact as much as possible throughout the massage. Try not to ‘hang up’ on this connection by focusing elsewhere.

Do put your intention in your hands. If you are hoping to help your baby fall asleep, make sure your strokes are slow and sleepy. A midday massage is likely to be more active and lively.

During this bonding time fill your mind with thoughts of the love you have for your child. Try to let your concerns float away. Bestow them with every blessing. Thoughts are powerful.

Moving their bodies around in ways which they are already trying to move is often very welcomed by them. Contraction they know from their previous tiny living space. Extension is exciting and interesting with our gentle respectful assistance.
Moving joints through their full range of motion helps the production of synovial fluid which lubricates the joints and just feels good.

Use your own body as a quick reference if you feel you have a question as to how the body moves.

The body loves balance. Try to remember to massage equally side to side.

The ears hands and feet have a unique reflexive connection with the rest of the body. Massaging an ear, hand or foot only can be very relaxing. And as mentioned, this is a great choice during illness when a full body massage is not recommended.

Massage can be rhythmic and include a song or a toy.

Crossing the body’s midline with each arm and each leg or adding any type of pattern or sustained movement is fun and interesting for your baby’s brain.

At the first sign of boredom, or ‘eh-eh’ language, change positions or the area you are massaging. And remember babies communicate slowly. Try to avoid their having to reach a full objection with tears before making a change. This builds trust. Developmentally, they are working to understand that they are safe in the world and can trust that their needs will be met.

Diaper free massage provides your baby with a restriction-free ability to move. Full body (head to toe) strokes are integrating for the nervous system.

With proprioceptors activated by touch throughout the body, babies increase their sense of where they are in space, and where their bodies begin and end. This enhanced awareness sometimes enables them to achieve the skill they have been striving towards. I’ve seen lots of new rollers, brand new walkers and hand clapping begin following a massage.

Get a massage for yourself whenever possible. Parenting is the most challenging and most important work on the planet...period. You too deserve regular massage!

As you enjoy massaging your baby, trust that your confidence and joy with this work will come fairly quickly.

Adding massage to your lives will likely increase your intuition, creativity and communication skills between you and your children and everyone you know...forever.