

— HAVE YOU TRIED —

BABY MASSAGE

BABY MASSAGE IS A SIMPLE AND ENJOYABLE WAY TO NURTURE
AND GROW THE SPECIAL BOND WITH YOUR BABY

Words: Karen Young

Touch is hugely important to all newborns. At this stage in life, it is the primary way that we communicate and connect with the world and those around us, and without it, we quite simply fail to thrive and grow.

Massaging babies shortly after they are born is an age-old tradition practised in many countries throughout the world, including India and across the African continent, yet it's something that was only formally introduced to the UK around three decades ago.

Since then, baby massage has grown in popularity with parents and other primary caregivers, not least because we are starting to appreciate the many benefits it has to offer. As well as being an effective way to bond and communicate with your baby, positive touch through massage helps to support emotional and physical development, and increases a parent's confidence in handling and caring for their little ones.

"Baby massage involves the parent carrying out a range of very gentle, rhythmical movements on their baby, including holding, stroking and stretching," explains Julie McFadden, FHT Registrar and baby massage instructor. "It's usually taught in a small group setting, with the instructor demonstrating the various techniques on a special doll. The parent then repeats these movements on their own child, who lies on a soft, towel-covered mat on the floor in front of them."

In most cases, babies wear just a nappy during the massage, and a small amount of oil or cream is applied to the skin – many instructors encourage parents



to bring a product that they know is suitable for their baby's skin.

Through this positive interaction, parents will often start to pick up on certain 'cues' in their baby's behaviour, from turning their head in a certain way to show they don't like something, to learning what different cries mean. Regular massage can also help parents become more familiar with nuances in their baby's skin, including texture, colour and temperature.

Baby massage is usually offered as a course of four to six weekly lessons, with each session lasting around 45 minutes to an hour. "In a class situation, it's not unusual for a baby to fall asleep during a massage routine or to need a feed or nappy change," explains Julie. "It's often a case of simply 'going with the flow'. At home, of course, massage can be carried out at any time that fits in with your baby's daily routine." ☀

The Federation of Holistic Therapists (www.fht.org.uk) is the UK and Ireland's leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists.

Five benefits of baby massage

1 Baby massage encourages parent-baby bonding and helps build confidence in first-time parents.

2 Many physical benefits are linked to touch and baby massage, including improved sleep, weight gain (particularly in preterm babies) and relief from colic.

3 If one parent has to spend less time with their baby due to work commitments, massage can help to give them another opportunity to bond.

4 If a parent is feeling isolated or low, baby massage classes offer time to socialise and share experiences with other mums and dads who are 'in the same boat'.

5 Baby massage is a way of focusing on your baby without having to concentrate on the more 'functional' side of things like feeding and changing nappies.

BEFORE YOU GO
Baby massage should be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Consult with your GP, midwife or other health professional for medical attention and any further advice.