

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Communicating With Newborns Through Massage

(NAPSA)—The first form of communication a parent has with his or her baby is through touch. To a newborn, touching is talking. Along with eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin contacts, the exchange of smiles and other facial expressions, baby massage is one of the best ways for parents to get an early start on building a relationship with their child.

“Infant massage lets parents bond with their child while providing basic positive benefits for the baby,” says James Dillard, M.D., medical director of Oxford’s complementary and alternative medicine program. “Massage has been shown to release muscle tension, enhance neurological development and improve immune, digestive, respiratory and circulatory systems.”

Infant massage is different from adult massage. It is important to pay attention to the amount of pressure exerted while massaging a baby. Strokes should be slow and gentle, traveling down a baby’s body to produce a calming effect. While baby massage can be done at any time of day, some research suggests the best time to massage is when baby is awake and “content.”

“Not only does baby massage offer emotional and physical benefits, it’s also easy to do, takes little time, and can be performed in the comforts of the baby’s home environment,” says Dillard.

Before beginning massage, it’s important to do some preparation work. Oxford offers the following checklist. It’s part of a pamphlet sent to its members who are new



Baby massage can be a healthy way for parents to communicate with their newborns.

parents called *A Guide to Baby Massage*:

- Wash your hands and remove jewelry that may harm your baby.
 - Remove your baby’s clothing. Make sure the room is not too cool (78 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal).
 - Place your baby on its back, on a flat surface covered by a soft towel or blanket.
 - Choose a comfortable position and dip fingers in baby oil.
 - Perform a patch test to be sure the oil doesn’t irritate your baby’s skin.
 - Rub hands together to warm oil before touching your baby’s skin.
- Once preparation is completed, the massage can begin. Each massage should last no longer than 10 to 15 minutes. Below are a few techniques to try. These techniques have been derived from *How to Baby Your Baby: With a Massage*, by Lucy Emerson Sullivan.
- Leg and Foot Massage—Elevate baby’s left leg with your right

hand. Wrap your left hand around the thigh and slowly stroke toward the foot. Then switch hands and stroke with the right hand. Repeat several times and switch to the other leg. Press the bottom of baby’s foot gently from the heel to the toe using thumbs. Knead each individual toe and make small circles around the ankle.

- Chest and Stomach—Place both hands flat, side by side, in the middle of the chest. Push out to the sides gently, following baby’s ribs. Position your hands so they rest on either side of baby’s torso. Keeping hands flat, use one hand to stroke diagonally across baby’s chest to the opposite shoulder. Cup the shoulder and push down gently. Gently slide your hand back to its starting position and repeat several times.

- Face and Head—Use fingertips to make small circles along the sides of baby’s jaw. Position fingers on the forehead and gently stroke from the center out towards the temples. Avoiding baby’s soft spot, gently make small circles all over baby’s head with fingertips.

Founded in 1984, Oxford Health Plans offers a variety of services and access to more than 50,000 providers to its members. Oxford’s Healthy Mother, Healthy Baby® program provides educational information on prenatal and newborn care and additional nurse case management for mothers-to-be with special needs.

Visit the Web site, oxfordhealth.com, and view *A Guide to Baby Massage* for more tips.