

**Bonding takes on a new meaning as massaging your baby can also provide comfort and show affection.**

# The Power of Touch

It's one of life's simple pleasures (massage has long been enjoyed by adults), and research is showing that babies grow and develop better when they are on the receiving end of the right touch. Infant massage is a skin-to-skin connection that helps parents and baby better read each other's body language – without saying a word.

Experts say that massage directly stimulates the musculoskeletal, nervous and circulatory system and encourages the overall physical development of babies. Boosting breathing and digestion, it improves a baby's circulation and the immune system as the massage moves lymph fluid around the body and purges harmful substances from the body.



Massage tones the muscles and makes joints more flexible, which is especially beneficial for premature babies, and creates body and mind awareness for babies with special needs. It also helps relieve minor ailments such as sinus, lung congestion, teething, constipation, colic and wind, and asthma. While it cannot always completely relieve discomfort, it is a good coping strategy for parents who may feel helpless about their babies' conditions, says Dr Irene Chan, a consultant paediatrician at iKids Paediatric Practice (a member of Pacific Healthcare). Sensing parental concern is a source of comfort to babies too.

### The Right Touch

An important sensory experience, touch is the first form of communication that a baby receives. Dr Chan confirms, "Massage helps the parent and Baby to bond as the baby will enjoy the intimacy. If parents are anxious in handling Baby, massaging allows parents to be more confident in handling Baby. An unsettled baby can be calmed by the soothing strokes of massage, and the process of massage will also

help parents to calm down."

Massaging does a world of good for parents too as they would find the interaction with baby relaxing and enjoyable. Touching teaches your baby about communication and establishes a non-verbal communication with him. Thus, it enhances your early relationship with the baby as it builds his self-esteem and sociability.

## Easy Does it

- Choose a warm quiet spot with soft lights.
- Ensure there's as little distraction as possible and that the baby feels safe and comfortable.
- Create a relaxing atmosphere by playing soothing music.
- Remove rings or other jewellery to avoid scratching the baby.
- You need: a waterproof mat, towels, tissues and nappies. (You never know when the baby may pee or poop!)
- Warm your hands before starting the massage.
- Oils help your hands move more smoothly on the baby's skin. Do a patch test on the baby to make sure that he is not allergic or irritated by the oil used. Place a little oil on the inside of his wrist or ankle, and leave it on for 20 to 30 minutes to allow time for a severe reaction to show. To eliminate sensitivity, wait for 12 to 24 hours. If the skin shows no signs of irritation, proceed with the massage. Do not use oil if irritation such as red, inflamed skin or a rash occurs.

Irene Tan from Birth & Beyond Group Pte. Ltd says, "Regular infant massage encourages a good relationship between the parent and Baby. It gives them a place and time to be together, free from worries and pressures from everyday life. It is a time of real communication between parent and baby, watching and learning from each

## Welcome the Year of the Rat !!

5 sets of Baby Treasures (worth \$50 each) and 10 pieces of Harvest Mousie Money Bank (worth \$25 each) to be won!

### Harvest Mousie Money Bank

Ring in the Lunar New Year on an auspicious note with a grinning Mousie Money Bank. Let your child start saving on the right note with this Harvest Mousie Money Bank dressed in traditional Chinese clothing which retails at \$25.

### Baby Treasures

Pondering over what would be a suitable gift for the little bundle of joy? A thoughtful creation to celebrate the arrival of the newborn, this Baby Treasures consists of the 2008 Singapore Uncirculated Coins from \$4 to \$5 to mark the baby's birth year, a personalized page to record the important notes and dates of the baby's development, and a set of lovely keepsake tins to store small baby items which retails at \$50.



### Motherhood / The Singapore Mint Promotion

7 February 2008 marks the first day of the Year of the Rat.  
 True  False

How many uncirculated coins are there in the Baby Treasures?  
 1 coin  6 coins  100 coins

What is the price of the Baby Treasures?  
 \$50  \$90  \$110

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

NRIC No.: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B.: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ (HP) \_\_\_\_\_ (Home/Office)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Send your entry to: MOTHERHOOD / THE SINGAPORE MINT  
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other and getting to know each other better. Through touch, it gives the baby security, love and respect. Regular infant massage will help the parents to be more aware of the subtle signals and cues (willingness and unwillingness) their babies give."

### Sleeping Aid

Most newborn babies wake several times during the night, but they typically sleep through the night by six months. Sleeplessness in infants includes desire for parental attention, colic or other digestive problems, indigestion, hunger, teething, and fever or other illnesses. When a baby has inadequate or disturbed sleep, physical problems can arise, affecting his growth and immune system, behavioural problems such as irritability and hyperactivity, and learning or attention problems.

The soothing strokes of the massage can lower the level of stress hormones in both mother and baby and result in relaxation and calmness that helps facilitate falling asleep. It's also a mutually pleasant experience for parent and Baby, says Dr Chan

Be careful with the amount of pressure applied. If it is too firm, the baby's skin will redden – more obvious on fair-skinned children.

### Cue Me, Baby

Before babies learn to talk, they communicate with us through signals so it's important that we

## Step-by-Step

- 1 Lie your baby down on a comfortable place and start with the legs first.
- 2 After massaging both the legs, proceed to the tummy area and then to the chest. For the tummy massage, massage your baby in between her feed. Some babies have ticklish stomachs so if your baby seems to be uncomfortable, discontinue this portion of massage.
- 3 After the chest massage, massage on the hands and face.
- 4 Last but not least, carefully roll your baby onto his tummy for the back massage. This should be especially gentle, as you do not want the baby having to feel as though he is being pushed down.

The most important thing to remember is that your baby will know what he likes and what he doesn't like. Pay close attention to his cues and the massage will be an enjoyable experience for you and your baby.



recognise, respect and respond to these cues, says Tan. If the baby shows disengagement signs, we should respect his choice and stop the massage. A general rule of thumb is for parents to use their intuition. Being able to read these cues helps parents to develop sensitivity towards their babies and become more confident of their parenting roles.

In general, signals that a baby sends out can be classified as willingness and avoidance cues. Willingness cues include eye contact, smooth movement of arms and legs, smiling, cooing, wide and bright eyes, and reaching out to you. Avoidance cues

include yawning, hiccupping, arching of body, finger splaying, irritability and stiff limbs, etc.

Watch out for stress signals under massage. Mild signals include yawning, avoiding eye contact and cough. Moderate signals include stretching fingers and tightening muscles, and strong ones include changes in skin colour, shallow breathing, and slow or quick heart rhythm.

Be careful with the amount of pressure applied. If it is too firm, the baby's skin will redden – more obvious on fair-skinned children. Too little pressure produces a ticklish feeling, which is ineffective. ■