

The Art of Touch



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THE ART OF CARE

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In our previous article, we focused on infant-care and the importance of love and nurturing in the first year of a baby's life. As promised, this month's article will give you insight into the art of baby massage together with some practical and simple essential aromatherapy oil remedies that are often used in Tibb practice for a number of childhood ailments.

Human beings are born with profound and highly developed senses. When allowed to develop in a healthy, loving environment these senses become fine-tuned and allow us to grow comfortably as individuals in the greater world. But perhaps, of the five senses the one that plays the most significant role in the first months of a baby's life is the sense of touch.

"There is something magical about holding a baby. It has to do with the beauty of skin-to-skin warmth, the sweet-smell of milk breath. Physical contact with a baby is all it promises to be because nothing is hidden. A baby communicates through sensation."

Deborah Jackson

Touch does not only allow for a baby to benefit but is equally beneficial to parents in that it establishes and seals a bond between parent and child. Furthermore, touch is important for the healthy development of an infant. Observation has shown that children who are deprived of physical contact generally suffer more from anxiety related disorders and are often insecure. That is why the practice of massage is so vital.

Recent studies have shown that babies who are massaged regularly were more active and alert, cried less, gained more weight, had better temperaments and were more easily soothed.

The Art of Massage

Massage must be a pleasurable experience for both baby and mother. Choose a time when you are feeling relaxed and unrushed. Most people prefer to massage their little ones during bath-time. If bath-time is suitable, then do half of the massage when applying the bath cleanser and complete the massage when applying the moisturizer. There are many classes that offer classes teaching methodology and the types of oils to use specifically for babies, however here are some general rules that anyone can follow which will certainly offer some benefit:

- Make a 'nest' with your legs or soft cushions. Cover with towels and lay baby gently on top.
- If baby is 'niggly' or unsettled, stop immediately. The massage must be an enjoyable experience.
- Firm, yet tender pressure should be applied-ALWAYS in the direction of the heart.
- Use as much of your hand as possible.
- Never overstimulate- The sequence should not last more than 15-30 minutes.
- Start at the feet with circular movement of the thumb using gentle pressure. (Do not massage the feet of a premature baby)
- Next, move to the torso and arms. This focuses on digestive problems and improves neuromuscular development. Apply oil from the base of the tummy, up across the chest, around the shoulders, along the arms to the hand. Put your thumb in baby's hand to stretch fingers one by one. Writing, "I love you" with the hands is a common practice and one that also has immense benefit.
- Massage the tummy gently in a circular clockwise motion.
- After massaging the torso and tummy, lie baby on a rolled up towel and gently massage the back and buttocks. Start at the legs and work slowly upwards with gentle thumb rotations, especially up either side of the spine.
- Finish off by gently massaging the face, moving along the jawline to the ears.

Oils and Remedies

There are many wonderful oils that can be used for massage. If you are at all uncertain, use a good quality unscented aqueous cream instead. Alternatively, many health shops have a variety of blended aromatherapy oils, which are formulated especially for infants.

There are a number of essential aromatherapy oils that you can use in your home for specific ailments and illnesses. For babies though, it is advisable to use no more than 3 drops of an essential oil mixed with a good quality base or carrier oil.

Carrier oils are oils considered to be safe as they are non-volatile. Some common carrier oils, which can be used even on their own are:

- Olive oil (commonly used for baby massage)
- Calendula oil
- Grape-seed oil
- Sweet Almond oil
- Jojoba oil

Babies receive great comfort from therapeutic massage when they are not well. Try one of the following remedies if your baby is unsettled:

Restlessness: Add 3 drops of Chamomile and 1 drop of lavender to 30ml of a carrier oil mentioned above, and massage gently at bedtime.

Digestive upsets: Add 3 drops of Mandarin to 30ml Sweet Almond oil and massage tummy in clockwise direction.

Colic: Add 3 drops Roman Chamomile to 30ml of carrier oil and massage tummy and back.

Dry Skin: Add 2 drops of lavender to 30ml olive oil and put a capful in baby's bath.