

Touch is an important way to promote secure parent-child attachment, that is used all over the world. Touch involves the focus of a parent on a child, which directly communicates love, caring, and respect. Touching, holding, hugging, and kissing children enhances children's development while promoting secure attachment.

Infant Massage is one way of expressing love, caring, and respect through touch that has been shown to have many benefits to parent-child attachment and children's development. Infant massage is a touch that mothers and other caregivers do with their infants, not to their infants. It is an interaction that involves gentle strokes and caresses over the infants' skin.

A Brief History of Infant Massage:

Therapeutic Massage has been used in Eastern cultures as far back as 3000 BC and Infant Massage has been practised by mothers in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and (Latin America) for centuries. Vimala Schneider McClure founded the Association of Infant Massage following her stay in India, 1973. Whilst there she worked in an orphanage and was exposed to the daily practice of massaging taking place from youngest to the oldest inhabitants. When she fell ill the women of the village helped massage her back to health. On her departure from the country she noticed a young woman sitting by the side of the road in a shantytown, lovingly massaging her infant on her lap. Spurred on by this vivid memory she decided that she would bring the techniques of infant massage back to America. She wrote the book *Infant Massage - A Handbook for Loving Parents* and combined the massage routine she had witnessed in India together with Swedish massage, Chinese reflexology and Yoga. This massage routine is being taught to parents and caregivers internationally in countries such as Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Germany and Canada.

Benefits of Infant Massage to Parents/Caregivers:

- Promotes secure attachment.
- Promotes relaxation.
- Promotes communication with child, both verbal and non-verbal.
- Enhances positive parenting skills.
- Increases confidence in parenting
- Provides pleasure and enjoyment
- Provides an opportunity to connect and share quality time
- Increases production of prolactin, the nurturing hormone
- Promotes understanding of how to touch and respond to baby in nurturing ways
- Has positive effects on other relationships, including partner and children
- Group classes provide the opportunity for mutual support from other parents/caregivers
- Provides an opportunity for fathers to promote secure attachment with their child

Benefits of Infant Massage for all Infants:

- Promotes secure attachment.
- Improves circulation, digestion and organization.
- Reduces muscular tension.
- Enhances awareness of being loved, accepted and safe.
- Reduces fussiness

- Helps infant learn to relax
- Promotes feelings of being respected and responded to
- Improves sleep
- Increases sense of well-being
- Strengthens the development of gastro-intestinal and respiratory tracts
- Reduces the symptoms of colic and gastro-intestinal tract distress

**Benefits of Infant Massage for Infants with Special Needs
(in addition to the above):**

- Helps relax tight muscles.
- Helps stimulate muscle tone for hypotonic babies.
- Increases infant's ability to maintain a functional alert state.
- Helps babies learn to accept and tolerate positive touch (especially for babies who have been hospitalized).
- Increases infant's ability to gain weight
- Helps infant sleep longer and deeper
- Helps decrease gas, constipation and gastro-intestinal tract distress
- Helps regulate tactile hyper or hypo sensitivity
- Improves eye contact and socialization
- Improves circulation, decreased mottling
- Decreases fisting and shoulder reaction
- Increases incidence of hands to midline
- General relaxation