

MASSAGE

Why?

Studies have shown that massage can reduce stress and anxiety and can aid pain relief during pregnancy and labour. This may be due to stimulation of endorphins (the body's natural pain relief) and the more endorphins we have in our blood stream during labour, the better we can cope with the pain of the contractions. Contact with the person who is caring for you can help to comfort and reassure you which enables you to focus on your breathing and relaxation skills. There has also been a link between massage and a shorter labour and a lower risk of post-natal depression.

How?

Massage can be carried out through clothing but is generally more effective with direct skin contact. Using oil on bare skin can help but ensure that the one you choose is safe for use during pregnancy (some aromatherapy oils are beneficial, but some are not safe). Baby oil or sweet almond oil can be used; avoid strong smelling oils which may cause nausea.

Start massaging at the shoulders – Try to lower your shoulders away from your ears - especially if you are feeling tense. Light downwards pressure from your partner's hands will help you drop your shoulders. Using the thumbs in a circular motion, gradually work along the muscle, gently pinching and lifting between the thumb and fingers to lengthen and relax the muscle.



Gradually work down the back; starting from the base of the skull sweep one hand and forearm right down the spine to the tail bone. As one hand reaches the bottom, the other hand should begin at the top. Continue for a few minutes in this way, slowly and rhythmically. If certain areas of the back are sore, focus on these and use the thumbs to apply some extra pressure in the muscles on either side of the spine and around the shoulder blades, working in small circles.



During labour, if you are experiencing a lot of pressure on the lower back and pelvis, your birthing partner may apply counter pressure directly onto the sacrum using the palm of the hand. Also adopting a kneeling position can ease the pressure felt on the back.

Sacral or pelvic pain can be eased with massage during pregnancy as well as through labour. The expectant mother could be positioned in side lying or forward leaning in sitting. The birthing partner can work either with the heel of the hand or for added pressure, use the thumbs into from the lower back into the buttocks and up over iliac crests.



Feet and legs can become swollen during pregnancy and getting massage to help reduce the swelling can be beneficial. Generally the touch has to be quite firm otherwise it will feel ticklish! Direct the massage from toes to knee to help sweep the fluid centrally. If your feet get cold during labour, a nice foot rub could help generate some heat.

BABY MASSAGE

Many babies love being touched and soothed by massage. It encourages bonding between the parents and the baby. Evidence shows that massage can help babies recover from birth, develop better sleep patterns and can even promote weight gain.

- Ensure room is warm and draught-free
- Warm oil or lotion in parent's hands first
- Baby should not be hungry
- Avoid stomach area immediately after feeding
- Simple stroking or gentle circling over baby's back or chest, arms, legs, hands and feet.

