

Mom and Baby Exercise

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MOM AND BABY EXERCISE

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Outline general guidelines for infant massage and demonstrate infant massage techniques for the arms, legs, feet, tummy, back, and head and face.
- Explain general guidelines for instructing an infant movement program and demonstrate eight infant movements to be performed by parent and baby.
- Suggest playful interactive activities for parents and baby.
- Outline general guidelines for mom and baby exercise and instruct the mother in eight exercises to be performed by mom and baby.

The opportunity to work with mothers and their new babies provides a rewarding experience and bonding environment. Mom and baby exercise programs provide an environment for mothers to restart exercise and spend special interaction time with their infant. Infant massage, infant movement and play, and mom and baby exercise can all be offered as separate classes to your clients, or they can be included as 15–30 minute segments in your existing classes.

INFANT MASSAGE

Infant massage acquaints parents with the importance and benefits of touch and relaxation for their infants. Parents can perform massage on their baby anytime after birth, and it is one more way for parents to bond with their child.

Massage helps babies to handle the increased stimulation they experience after leaving the womb, and it teaches them to relax when experiencing stress (McClure, 1989). A study conducted by the University of Miami Medical Center demonstrated that premature infants who were massaged for 15 minutes 3 times a day over a period of 10 consecutive days averaged 47% greater weight gain per day than premature infants who were not massaged. The massaged infants were also more active and alert and demonstrated more neurological development than premature infants who were not massaged. In addition, the massaged infants' hospital stay was 6 days shorter than that of the control group (Field et al., 1986). These results echo the outcome of a 1977 study, headed by Dr. Ruth Rice, on premature babies upon discharge from the hospital. One group of mothers was instructed in infant massage and a rocking routine. Another group of mothers was instructed in the usual newborn care only. The babies who were massaged and rocked showed greater gains in both weight and neurological development (Rice, 1977). According to researchers, natural sensory stimulation produced by massage speeds the myelination of the brain and nervous system (Epstein, 1974; Reinis and Goldman, 1980; Rorke and Riggs, 1969; Brown, 1984).

Massage can have the following physiologic benefits for infants (Inman, 1998):

- Increased strength and regulation in respiratory, circulatory, and gastrointestinal functions.
- Improved muscle tone and motor skills.
- Soothing stimulation to the developing nervous system, sensory nerves, and motor nerves.
- Stimulation to the growing brain cells, influencing mental development.
- Healing effects on birth trauma by soothing strained or pulled muscles.
- Enhanced infant sense of touch.
- Relief from daily stress that builds up from new encounters.
- Relief from gas pain caused by colic.

Massage also provides the following psychological benefits for infants and parents:

- Enhanced nurturing of the parent-infant relationship to promote bonding.
- Promotion of a healthy body awareness and self-image.
- Encouragement of parents to relax and focus on their babies.
- Increased confidence in parents as caregivers.

Infant Massage Guidelines

Before adding infant massage to your classes, here are a few things you need to know:

- Parents should obtain approval from the baby's doctor before participating in an infant massage program.
- Infant massage should be performed in a calm, relaxing environment. Try to minimize bright lights, chilly drafts, and loud noises.
- Pick a comfortable spot to perform the massage. In class, have mats available. At home, parents can use a carpet, bed, or mat.
- Have soft towels available to lay the baby on, to wipe off excess oil, and to cover the areas of the baby that aren't being massaged.
- Choose a time when the baby is quiet but alert, not too tired, and has not just eaten.
- The person performing the massage should also be relaxed.
- Use an edible oil, such as a vegetable or nut oil (almond is great). Remember, babies put hands and feet in their mouths!
- Pour a small amount of oil into the palm of the hand and allow it to warm before applying to the baby's skin. A small amount of oil should be tested on baby's skin the day before to be certain that it does not cause irritation.
- Encourage the parent to listen to the baby's cues. If the baby is not enjoying the massage, end it and try again later.
- Soft lullabies can be sung or played during the massage.
- The touch should be gentle but firm. Two to three repetitions of each stroke are enough at first. As parent and baby become more accustomed to the massage, sessions can be lengthened.

Getting Started

When teaching a mom and baby course, you may use a doll to demonstrate massage and movement techniques. Instruct parent to lay the baby on towels, either on a mat, floor, bed, or on the parent's lap. After the baby is undressed and oiled, it's nice to start with a "hello stroke." Maintain eye contact and while talking lovingly, gently stroke the baby from head to toes. If the baby's body stiffens or the baby cries, the massage may need to end for that session.

Feet, Legs, and Arms

It helps to massage the feet first so that the baby can easily see what the parent is doing. Perform the following strokes on each leg and repeat them on the arms.

Milking: Parent's right hand holds baby's right foot. Grasp the right thigh with the left hand and gently squeeze the leg, stroking from the thigh to the ankle, in a milking motion. Now reverse the motion going from ankle to thigh.



Clay Worm: Picture the baby's leg as a piece of soft clay. Roll the leg from knee to ankle as if sculpting a clay worm. Finish by gently shaking the leg.

Foot Massage: While holding the heel in one hand, use the other hand to gently flex the foot toward the shin. Then use the thumbs to gently press over the heel and sole of the foot. Gently squeeze each little toe. End by drawing circles around the anklebones with the thumbs.



Tummy and Back

Perform the following strokes on the chest and abdomen and repeat them on the back. A note of caution: When working on the back, avoid pressing directly on the spine and avoid massaging an infant's tummy until the umbilical cord has fallen off and has completely healed.



Open Book: Place the hands flat on the middle of the baby's chest, at the sternum. Push out along the baby's rib cage to the shoulders, as if smoothing the pages of a book or the wrinkles in a tablecloth. Finish the stroke by bringing the hands down toward the belly button. Another way to picture this is to draw a heart with the hands, using the same landmarks (sternum, shoulders, navel).

Paddle Wheel: Place the left hand on the baby's tummy with the little finger at the base of the rib cage. Stroke downward. Follow the left hand with the right hand. Alternate hands in a paddle-wheel motion. Next, hold the baby's feet together in one hand while lifting the legs up as if to diaper the baby. With the other hand, perform the paddle-wheel motion on the back. This is a great massage to help get rid of gas. When using the paddle wheel on the back, do not press directly on the spine—stay to either side of it.



The "I Love U" Stroke: With the fingers, trace the letter "I" down the baby's left side, starting at the base of the ribs. Then trace an inverted "L," starting on the baby's right side and stroking across the belly, then down on the left side (fingers end up left of the navel). Next, trace an inverted "U," stroking from low on the baby's right side, then up and around the navel and back down the left side.

Head and Face

Peekaboo: Parent's hand covers the baby's face. Gently press on the forehead with the fingertips. Next, push out to the side of the face and gently press the temples. With the thumbs, press lightly on the eyelids. Move the thumbs to the bridge of the nose and push down lightly, then move the hands down and across the cheeks.



Getting Cheeky: Using the fingertips, massage gently in small circles around both sides of the baby's jaw, just by the earlobes. Go over and around the back of the ears, making a big loop. Then, push the skin under the jaw up, forming a sort of double chin.



Overall Head and Face: While cradling (cupping) the baby's head in the hands, gently massage the scalp using small circular motions (as if shampooing). Avoid the fontanelle, or soft spot, on the top of the head. Massage the ears between the thumb and index finger. Trace a heart shape with the fingers, starting at the center of the forehead, out to the temples, and down to the chin. Place the thumbs between the baby's eyebrows and stroke from the center out to the temples. Repeat this same stroke for the (closed) eyelids. Stroke from the bridge of the baby's nose out to the cheeks using the thumbs. With the fingertips, gently massage in small circles over the baby's jaw, including the temporal-mandibular joint. End with the heart-shape stroke.

Finish infant massage with light, feathery strokes down the whole body, known as effleurage.

INFANT MOVEMENT PROGRAM

An exercise program for babies? According to research, babies in movement programs generally talk earlier, have better appetites, sleep more soundly, and experience greater acceleration in their motor development than babies who are not exercised. Infant movements also accelerate the development of coordination and agility, as well as increase flexibility and strength (Olkin, 1992).

Infant Movement Program Guidelines

- Parents should obtain approval from their baby's doctor before participating in an infant massage or movement program, as these movements may not be appropriate for all infants. Provide a pamphlet of the basic techniques and movements for parents to show their physician.
- Become familiar with infant and child development. Create routines and movements that meet the guidelines for their development.
- Use a soft surface to place the baby on, such as a mat or a folded blanket.
- Keep sessions to a maximum of twenty minutes, and do not allow participation in more than two sessions a day.
- Parents should pay attention to the baby's cues—if the baby is crying or acting agitated, the session should stop.
- Do not exercise a hungry or tired baby or a baby that has just eaten.

- Use gentle, fluid movements. Avoid quick, jerky movements. NEVER force a joint into a position!
- Begin by moving the joints that are closest to the torso and work outward.
- Use music and/or sing and talk to the baby during the session.
- Have fun! It should be playful, not mechanical!
- Repeat each exercise 5–10 times.
- Exercise must be age-appropriate. If a baby can't hold up his or her head, the parent must support the baby's head.
- Very young infants may be too weak to begin these exercises. Young infants startle easily and quickly become over stimulated.

Infant Movements

Chest stretch: With baby clasping the parent's thumb, hold the baby's hand and bring his or her arms out wide. Now bring the arms across the chest.



Opposite arm to leg stretch: Parent's right hand holds baby's left hand and parent's left hand holds baby's right foot. Bring arm down and leg up until hand and foot meet. Repeat with opposite arm and leg.

Bicycle: Each of parent's hands holds each of baby's legs. Gently move the legs back and forth in a pedaling motion.



Leg over stretch: Each of parent's hands holds each of baby's legs. Gently cross the baby's left leg over the right (the hip will probably come up off the mat). Return to starting position and repeat by crossing right leg over left leg.



V legs: Each of parent's hands holds each of baby's legs. Lift legs up, as if diapering. Slowly separate each leg into a "V." Do not force legs too far open. Return to starting position and repeat.

Fanny circles: One of parent's hands holds both legs while the other hand cradles the buttocks. Make a circular motion with the fanny while keeping the legs fairly straight. Circle in one direction, then the other.



Toes-to-nose stretch: Parent grasps the baby's feet and gently stretches the legs toward him or her, then up to the baby's nose. Some babies will not be able to reach their nose—do not force it!

Baby sit-ups: Hold baby's hands (let baby grasp parent's hands). Slowly pull the baby up into a sitting position. DO NOT let baby's head fall backward! If the baby isn't strong enough to hold his or her head, one of parent's hands holds the baby's hands while the other hand supports the head. Slowly lower the baby back down.



More Fun Stuff...

- Include such things as rattles, unbreakable mirrors, and crinkly toys in your classes. Shake a rattle above the baby and on each side. Wait for the baby to look in the direction of the rattle. Encourage the baby to reach for the object, hold it, and shake it for his or herself, depending on the baby's developmental age.
- Place the baby on his or her tummy. While the baby's hands are on the mat, palms down, gently raise the legs while the baby supports him or herself with the arms. This exercise is good for babies 5–8 months old.
- Have a crawling race. Encourage parents to participate and to keep pace with their baby. Or line babies up and let them go. Show encouragement with (not too loud) cheers and applause. Give hugs and kisses for all babies afterward. One note of caution: Some parents, even with babies at this tender age, tend to let the old competitive monster out. Do not let the parents get overexcited. Remind them that this is for fun and play, not competition.
- Have a bag of balls available. Parents roll the balls back and forth to their babies or have babies chase the balls.
- Parents can lay their baby across a small fitness ball (large beach balls work, too). Encourage baby to kick.
- Build a large pile of blanket "steps." Encourage baby to climb up them. Good for babies 9–12 months old.

You may want to offer separate classes for different age groups. For example, by offering separate classes for ages 0–4 months, 5–8 months, and 9–12 months, you can have more active and vocal exercises for the older groups. Or if your room is large enough, divide it into two or three (0–5 months and 6–12 months) age groups.

MOM AND BABY EXERCISE

Incorporating baby into regular exercises can be fun for both mom (or dad) and baby and provides mom with an opportunity to recondition muscles that may have become weakened from pregnancy and allow her to interact with her child. Babies love to watch their parents work out, especially when there is music. Some babies will be lulled to sleep by the rhythmic movement.

Mom and Baby Exercise Guidelines

- Ensure mom has received approval before participating in a mom and baby exercise program.
- Babies should not be held or worn in a baby harness during strenuous, high-impact activities.
- Do not use hand-held weights or barbells around an infant (or any child).
- Never release your grasp of the baby when the exercise lifts the baby off the floor.
- Never let holding an infant compromise correct form and posture. If an exercise cannot be performed properly while holding the infant, the baby should be set down.

Exercises

Curl-backs: Lay baby on lap (thighs) during abdominal curl-back exercises. Hold onto baby's hands.



Airplane ride: Lie on back and bend knees to chest. Place baby on lower legs (shins) and pretend to give him or her an airplane ride. Never release your grasp of the baby.

Kiss-the-baby crunches: In same position as airplane ride, perform abdominal crunches. As mother curls up, baby kisses are given. Older babies can sit on mom's tummy.



Baby leg lifts: Lie on back with knees at a 90-degree angle and baby resting on lower legs. Lower legs, moving heels toward buttocks, then lift legs back to starting position. Keep lower back pressed against the floor throughout entire movement.

Horsy ride: Have baby sit on mom's tummy during bridging. Baby will feel like he or she is going on a "horsy ride."





Flying baby: Bench press while holding baby rather than weights. Baby must be able to hold head up for this exercise.

Kiss-the-baby push-ups: Lay baby underneath mom while mom does push-ups. Mom kisses baby each time she lowers her chest toward the floor.



Leg extensions: Sit on the edge of a chair with both knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place baby on one shin. Hold onto baby's hands and straighten the leg that the baby is on. Repeat on the other leg.



OUT OF CLASS EXERCISE GUIDELINES

Baby joggers, strollers, kiddie bike trailers, and backpacks are great ways for parents to take their baby along with them on outdoor exercise sessions. Here are some precautions that should be taken when using these items and when exercising outdoors with a baby:

- Do not take baby out in extreme weather conditions.
- Use the canopy when outdoors, whether it's sunny or cloudy. Use sunblock on babies 6 months old and older.
- Avoid bumpy terrain until the baby is at least 1 year old. If this is unavoidable, deflate the tires slightly on the jogger or trailer to minimize the bouncing.
- Use a bicycle helmet to protect the baby's head when in a jogger or trailer.

- Use caution flags and reflectors on joggers and trailers. Do not use joggers at dusk or nighttime. Avoid areas of heavy traffic.
- Baby strollers are not appropriate for jogging or running. Joggers should not be used until the baby is at least 6 months old. Check with manufacturer for trailer use (it may vary depending on make and model).
- When hiking with a baby choose trails that are wide enough to avoid tree branches that could hit the baby's face. Check manufacturer's warnings before applying bug spray on any child. Dress the baby in long sleeves, pants, and a hat to avoid tick bites. Take into consideration proximity to help, should immediate first aid be needed.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend swimming classes for children under 3 years of age, unless taught by trained instructors and/or organizations. Excessive and potentially dangerous amounts of water can be inhaled or swallowed by infants. Dangerous parasites and viruses can be transmitted in pool water. Infants are much more susceptible than adults to these "bugs." Parents may also develop a false sense of security and think that because their child can swim and that strict supervision may not be necessary.

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RESOURCES

The International Association of Infant
Massage
www.iaim-us.com
805-644-8524

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org
847-434-4000

Andrea Grace
Mommy and Baby Fitness
www.mommyandbabyfitness.com
905-761-8731

CPR Certification
National Safety Council
www.nsc.org
1-800-621-7619

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
800-242-8721

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org
202-303-4498

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