



Pregnancy massage can help you cope with the changes to your body that occur while you are pregnant (even before you fall pregnant and after giving birth!). It can be especially useful to ease discomfort at a time when you can't use some medicines or some other medical options. Maternal massages are generally considered safe after the first trimester, as long as you get the green light from your practitioner and you let your massage therapist know you're pregnant.

WHAT IS PREGNANCY MASSAGE?

Pregnancy or prenatal massage is used to reduce stress, reduce swelling in the arms and legs and relieve muscle and joint pain in pregnant women. Massage in pregnancy can involve many different massage techniques. It is usually a gentle massage. Pregnancy can put a lot of stress on your back, shoulders, neck and abdominal muscles. Pregnancy massage is designed to relieve some of the aches and pains that are common during pregnancy. A qualified therapist will understand the areas to target and which to avoid.

The therapist will help you to get comfortable with pillows. Remember it is not a good idea to lie flat on your back while you are in the second half of your pregnancy as this puts too much pressure on the vein that runs from your legs to your heart. So massage may be done

Pregnancy Massage

lying on your side, or on your stomach if the therapist has a specific pregnancy bed that allows your tummy to fit through a hole in the bed.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PREGNANCY MASSAGE?

The health benefits of pregnancy massage are that it seems to reduce stress, relax and loosen your muscles, increase blood flow and improve the lymphatic system. It can also improve mood, lower anxiety and help you sleep better. Pregnancy massage has also been shown to be very effective during labour to help manage pain and improve your emotional experience of labour.

Only a handful of small studies have focused on massage in pregnancy. No definite benefits have been established. However; one study at the University of Miami School of Medicine suggested that massage therapy might have multiple positive effects, including:

- lowered anxiety
- decreased back and leg pain

- improved sleep
- decreased levels of the stress hormone norepinephrine.

In another study of pregnancy massage in depressed women, researchers found:

- increased levels of the 'feel-good' hormones serotonin and dopamine;
- decreased levels of cortisol, an indicator of stress; and
- an overall improvement in mood.

Research has shown that, for the general population, massage has many other potential benefits. It may relieve pain, or it may boost the immune system's ability to fight off viruses and infections.

These benefits may include:

- deep relaxation
- stress or anxiety reduction
- increased nutrient absorption
- increased immune functioning
- assisting the lymphatic system
- assisting the circulatory system
- reduced muscle strain
- reduced stretch marks

- decreased oedema or swelling
- decreased levels of melanin
- increased flexibility in muscles and joints
- relief from spasms and cramps
- emotional support and physical nurture.

A TIMELINE FOR PRE- TO POST-PREGNANCY MASSAGE

Prenatal Massage

(Massage Before Pregnancy)

This is massage therapy before pregnancy, when the woman is ready to become pregnant – this is a precious moment and massage has a very important place. Aromatherapy, Reflexology and Acupuncture are proven methods for good relaxation, stress reduction and reaching maximum fitness before conceiving. Massage may compliment a stressful time during conception, especially during fertility treatment.

Antenatal Massage

(Massage During Pregnancy)

- Massage during pregnancy combines therapeutic bodywork with great attention to the special needs of the mother-to-be, as her body undergoes the dramatic changes in preparation for the childbirth experience.
- Massage therapy enhances the function of muscles and joints, improves circulation and body tone and relieves mental and physical fatigue.

- Touch is so important for the mother-to-be, vital for her physical and emotional wellbeing as she adapts to her new body image. With this special attention, the treatments will create additional nurturing to the new life that grows within her.

Postnatal Massage

(Massage After The Baby is Born)

It is an important time for mother and baby to spend together. However, don't forget that the health of the new mother during this time is critical.

- Back pain, muscle stiffness and joint aches can linger long after giving birth.
- Back pain may be accentuated with the lifting and carrying of the new baby.
- Hormones, emotions, lack of sleep and adjusting to motherhood can be stressful and create anxiety that massage can relieve.

WHAT ARE THE CONTRAINDICATIONS TO PREGNANCY MASSAGE?

Firstly, there are no studies to suggest a direct link between massage and miscarriage. In fact, most miscarriages are not caused by anything the mother did or didn't do. So massage is not causative of miscarriage.

However, there may be some instances where massage may not be advised. A 'contraindication' is a condition to suggest or indicate that something (like massage) shouldn't be done. Some contraindications are absolute, which means do not have massage if you have that contraindication.

These may include:

- bleeding in the 2nd and/or 3rd trimester;
- placenta praevia;
- unexplained low pelvic pain in any trimester;
- pre-eclampsia;
- eclampsia;
- deep vein thrombosis (DVT);
- varicose veins; and
- severe symptomatic heart disease.

Relative contraindications to pregnancy massage are contraindications that mean you might or might not be able to have massage so check with your doctor or midwife first if you have any of the following:

- Bleeding in the first trimester is often a reflection of normal establishment of the pregnancy and does not represent ill health. If accompanied by pain, then massage is to be avoided and medical advice taken.
- Any coincidental disease in pregnancy requiring prescribed medicines, for example diabetes or epilepsy.
- Any infectious illness causing fever. Treatment should be avoided if your temperature exceeds 38°C.
- Pre-existing bone disease and osteoporosis – because of the possibility of bone fracture if the massage pressure is too deep.
- Severe swelling.
- If you have severe nausea, vomiting or morning sickness.
- High blood pressure/hypertension.

You may think of massage as a luxury to indulge in on occasion. But one of the most beneficial times for massage may be during your pregnancy. Taking care of 'mum' and her physical and mental health is key to having a healthy and enjoyable pregnancy.



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