

Expecting Moms Embrace Massage

Pregnancy Massage Contributes to Nine Healthy Months

Hope Bentley

During pregnancy physical and emotional changes cascade throughout the body. Nausea, fatigue, swelling, heartburn, headache, and emotional turbulence are just some of the symptoms that come with the territory. Fortunately, massage can help ease these issues, so that the mom-to-be can focus on what's most important: her baby.

The First Trimester

"In the first trimester I see a lot of cases of nerves," says Megan O'Connor, a New York-based certified prenatal massage therapist. "Massage can give reassurance." This is largely because newly pregnant women may experience a range of emotions--elation, anxiety,

founder of Niara Healing Arts Massage Therapy and Perinatal Support Systems, "It is absolutely safe and can be very beneficial for an expecting mother."

Having said that, there are some precautions to take when considering prenatal massage. If it is a high-risk pregnancy or there's a history of complications--diabetes, high blood pressure, miscarriages, placenta previa, preeclampsia, or any other medical condition--a midwife or doctor should be consulted before scheduling a massage. In addition, it is very important for pregnant clients to speak openly with their massage therapist about any concerns or issues.



Massage can help contribute to a healthy pregnancy--and a healthy baby.

contentment, and even fear--made more poignant by the hormonal changes that accompany pregnancy. Fortunately, massage therapy can help ground an expecting mother and ease the emotional roller coaster that comes with pregnancy.

But is massage safe in the first trimester? According to Susanrachel Condon,

On the other hand, bodywork techniques like shiatsu access the meridians used in acupuncture, including trigger points that can relieve nausea. According to O'Connor, a good therapist will also teach a mother-to-be how to activate the trigger points herself, as most nausea treatments are more

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*Tension is who
you think you
should be.
Relaxation is
who you are.
Chinese
Proverb*

Office Hours and Contact

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effective when applied at least three times a day. Techniques such as this can be a great relief to a woman navigating the early days of pregnancy.

The Second Trimester

A woman in her second trimester may begin to have trouble with circulation, sometimes because the baby's weight begins to pinch the major veins in the mother's legs. Poor circulation can cause swelling of the extremities, headaches, and exacerbated carpal tunnel syndrome. Massage will increase circulation and help create space in the body to relieve the pressure from the baby's weight. Condon explains that weight gain and joint laxity can cause women to feel off balance and clumsy. Massage can relax the muscles around the joints and ground and balance a pregnant woman.

The Third Trimester

As the baby grows heavy in the final trimester of pregnancy, major changes are likely to occur in the musculoskeletal system, and massage can become even more essential.

"A lot of women feel discomfort in their lower backs because the womb is moored to the sacrum, which is that triangle of area at the base of the spine," O'Connor says. "The weight of the womb pulls on that mooring and can be very uncomfortable."

Women may also experience discomfort in their abdomen. As the baby grows, the mother's muscles are stretched, her organs are compacted, and her lungs are compressed. Massage can minimize or prevent abdominal muscle tear, a complication that happens with some women. A practitioner can also help reposition the baby to alleviate discomfort and ease breathing.

And when labor finally begins, massage can help facilitate the birth, perhaps especially appealing for women considering natural childbirth.

On the Table

But how exactly does a pregnant woman--complete with enormous tummy and tender chest--receive a massage? Many prenatal massages are given with the pregnant woman on her side, semi-reclined, briefly on her back,

or on a specially designed pregnancy massage table, and often with a network of pillows for support.

Condon explains that prenatal massage is not simply a regular massage except in a different position. A qualified prenatal massage therapist will know the changing physiognomy of a pregnant woman and will tailor the massage to the needs of the client.

Postpartum Massage

Now that baby is here, mom needs a massage more than ever. Says O'Connor, "I think postpartum massage is extremely underrated."

After baby arrives, bodywork can help a new mother ease back into her body again, relax sore muscles, address any abdominal muscle strains or tears that occurred during pregnancy, and cope with the life changes and lack of sleep

that come with a new baby. In addition, the uterus will sometimes linger low in the abdomen instead of returning to its proper place. A Maya abdominal massage therapist can help restore the uterus to its proper position.

Nursing moms may feel reluctant to book a massage due to leaking breasts, but O'Connor says not to worry. "Women shouldn't be concerned about massage while they're nursing, even if they feel like an uncapped fire hydrant!" she says. Practitioners will accommodate nursing women, with proper draping and towels.

Pregnancy is an important time that needs to be honored, and prenatal massage plays an important role. As the body goes through miraculous changes, bodywork facilitates pregnancy and helps the expectant mother stay comfortable, connected, and healthy.



Prenatal massage can greatly benefit an expecting mother throughout her pregnancy.

Magical Mango

Shelly Burns

Treating yourself to a mango is a perfect way to add some sunshine to your routine. A mango is more than just a sweet, delicious fruit. It has properties beneficial to skin, including water-soluble vitamins like B2, B3, B6, folic acid (B9), and C. Mango is also a good source of beta-carotene and vitamin A.

Vitamin B complex delays skin's aging process. B vitamins provide a healthy glow, increased tone, and hydrated cells. The anti-inflammatory properties in B3 help skin retain moisture, alleviating dryness and irritation.

Vitamin C protects against the DNA damage that leads to skin cancer. This powerful antioxidant reduces the wrinkling effects of free radical damage, and combats other signs of aging by strengthening collagen and elastin.

Beta-carotene gives mango its wonderful orange color and has an important role in protecting our skin's DNA. Dry, flaky skin can be remedied with the vitamin A

derived from beta-carotene, which is important for repairing and maintaining healthy skin. Vitamin A has also been shown to help reduce and clear acne breakouts.

Other beneficial nutrients found in mango include magnesium, phosphorus, silica, sulfur, and vitamin E. These nutrients each play a role in strengthening the connective tissue in our body, including skin, bone, hair, nails, and muscle.

Mango is not just beneficial to skin. Its nutrients reduce high blood pressure, the risk of stroke, and the chance of contracting heart disease. Mango also contains approximately 20 percent of the recommended dietary intake of fiber and enzymes, which promote healthy digestion.

Mango is especially helpful for long, dry winters, but you can enjoy it at any time of year. It will help you maintain smooth skin and a healthy glow.



Mango offers a variety of health benefits

Here Comes the Sun

Updated UV Index Shines Light on Rays

A crucial warning system has been recently updated for your skin's protection. In compliance with the World Health Organization, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Weather Service revamped the UV Index, a system created to alert people about the level of harmful ultraviolet (UV) light rays from the sun. Overexposure to UV rays can cause wrinkles and premature aging, skin cancer, cataracts, and immune system suppression.

Many factors influence the strength of UV rays: UV light is stronger in the summer, at higher altitudes, and in areas closer to the equator. It's also stronger at midday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun is directly overhead.

The new UV index ranges from 0-11 with guidelines as follows:

0-2: **LOW.**

Minimal exposure for the average person, but watch for reflected UV from snow and water.

3-5: **MODERATE.**

Stay in the shade during midday. Cover-up outside.

6-7: **HIGH.**

Wear a hat, sunglasses, and a sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. Avoid midday sun.

8-10: **VERY HIGH.**

Take extra precautions, and avoid midday sun. Wear protective clothing.

11: **EXTREME.**

Take all precautions, seek shade, and avoid midday sun. If possible, stay indoors.

As part of its daily forecast, the National Weather Service publishes the UV index for each area of the country. Go to www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html and enter your zip code to find your UV index for the day. The Weather Channel, as well as most local TV stations, include the UV index in their weather forecast. It can also be found at www.weather.com.

For a detailed description of the UV index, or for more information on sun protection, visit www.epa.gov/sunwise.

Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths.

Etty Hillesum

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