

Research says massage may help infants sleep more, cry less and be less stressed

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New research by a team at the University of Warwick says that massage may help infants aged under six months sleep better, cry less and be less stressed.

The team of researchers from Warwick Medical School and the Institute of Education at the University of Warwick was led by Angela Underdown. They looked at nine studies of massage of young children covering a total of 598 infants aged under six months. They found the various studies showed a range of significant results including indications that infants who were massaged cried less, slept better, and had lower levels of stress hormones such as cortisol compared to infants who did not receive massage. One of the studies examined also claimed that massage could affect the release of the hormone melatonin, "which is important in aiding infants' sleeping patterns," Underdown said. She added that:

"Given the apparent effect of infant massage on stress hormones, it is not surprising to find some evidence of an effect on sleep and crying," said Angela Underdown of the University of Warwick.

One study also provided evidence that massage could help build better relationships between infants and mothers who had postnatal depression, although the reviewers said more research is needed to confirm this effect.

One other study indicated that massage, eye contact and talking had a

significant effect on growth and a significant reduction in illnesses and clinic visits for infants receiving little tactile stimulation in an orphanage but this was an unusual set of circumstances and the other studies, where infants were receiving normal levels of tactile stimulation, found no effect on growth.

The studies mainly involved infant massage by parents who were trained by health professionals in appropriate technique. Parents who wish to massage their babies can learn how to do this at locally run classes.

Source: University of Warwick

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