

# Massage therapy may enhance immunity in preterm infants

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For stable, preterm infants, daily massage therapy is positively associated with higher natural killer cell cytotoxicity and weight gain, according to a study published online Nov. 12 in *Pediatrics*.

(HealthDay)—For stable, preterm infants, daily massage therapy (MT) is positively associated with higher natural killer (NK) cell cytotoxicity and weight gain, according to a study published online Nov. 12 in *Pediatrics*.

In an effort to determine whether MT enhances the immune system by increasing the proportion of NK cells, Jocelyn Y. Ang, M.D., of the Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit, and colleagues conducted a randomized placebo-controlled trial involving 58 stable, [preterm infants](#) who received MT and 62 infants who received a sham control therapy in the [neonatal intensive care](#) unit (NICU). Therapy was provided five days a week until discharge (maximum of four weeks). Immunological

evaluations were conducted, and weight, number of infections, and length of stay were assessed.

The researchers found no difference in the absolute [NK cells](#), but NK cytotoxicity was higher in the massage group, particularly for those who received five or more consecutive days of intervention versus control. Infants in the MT group were heavier at the end of the study and, compared with controls, had increased daily weight gain.

"We found a positive association between MT and NK cytotoxicity as well as MT and weight gain in premature infants. MT appears to be safe and may improve the overall outcome of premature infants in the NICU," the authors write. "This randomized, placebo-controlled study suggests the beneficial effect of MT on premature infants and underscores the need for additional larger studies."

**More information:** [Abstract](#)  
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