

What are the benefits of pregnancy massage?

Some of the benefits of massage therapy and bodywork in pregnancy and labor include:

- emotional support in a time of transition;
- relaxation and stress reduction;
- immune system enhancement;
- increased blood and lymph circulation;
- reduction of leg edema;
- relief of muscle spasms and myofascial pain;
- reduction of strain and dysfunction in weight-bearing joints and myofascial structures;
- development of sensory awareness to prepare for the experience of labor;
- improved labor outcome with reduced pain perception and shorter labors;
- and enhancement of a mother's ability to touch her own baby lovingly. (1)

Effects of Pregnancy Massage

Pregnancy massage and massage for labor and postpartum recuperation is the newest option for women who want an optimum pregnancy outcome. As more therapists are trained to provide pregnancy-specific massage therapy, many women are being exposed to its potential and enjoying its benefits.

When women experience stress in pregnancy, blood levels of the neurotransmitters cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine surge. Conversely, levels of dopamine and serotonin are suppressed by stress; low levels of these hormones are associated with mood states like anger and anxiety. Recent studies have shown extensive effects on the growing fetus of stress experienced by pregnant mothers. Not only do infants of stressed moms show higher levels of cortisol and lower levels of serotonin and dopamine, they seem to cry and fuss more as babies, and perform less well on such measures of infant development as the Brazelton scale.

Pregnancy massage delivered with a nurturing touch can lower circulating levels of cortisol and norepinephrine, increase levels of serotonin and dopamine, and measurably affect a pregnant woman's anxiety and depression. Tiffany Field has reported that the decrease in stress hormone production after massage lasts as long as two weeks. Thus two-week intervals are a good baseline for pregnancy massage sessions. . Pregnancy massage also lower blood pressure; since elevated blood pressure is a marker of potential complications in pregnancy, this intervention can provide substantial benefit for women who are at risk.

Postpartum massage can address the musculoskeletal discomfort induced by long hours of baby feeding and baby care, as well as residual dysfunction that may have developed during pregnancy or labor. Postpartum women need help in reorienting their bodies to post-pregnancy structure: otherwise, they tend to maintain anterior positioning of the shoulders and pelvic girdle, leading to neck, upper back, and low back pain later in life. The skin and superficial fascia of the abdomen can be treated immediately after birth to minimize the distortion of connective tissue layers that so often follows pregnancy.

The physical demands of caring for a newborn – feeding, diapering, changing, walking, and transferring to and from car seats, strollers, and beds can provoke neck, upper back and lumbar muscle and joint strain.

Just as a skilled massage therapist can provide appropriate therapy and emotional support to a pregnant client, in the post-partum period, professional massage therapy can give a new mother the kinds of physical support that many traditional societies provide as a matter of course, where daily massage of the new mother's abdomen, back and legs is common in the first month after childbirth. (2)

Important Note

Prenatal massage is considered safe for expectant moms with no complications. If you are experiencing complications or suspect that you are, it's important to inform your therapist before receiving therapy. It is also strongly encouraged for clients in high-risk pregnancies to request medical releases from the individual's pregnancy care provider.

Expertise and Specialized Training

Our massage therapist Mandy Mehner has received additional training in prenatal massage especially designed for pregnancy related issues and has been practicing them since 2005. Depending on the trimester, Mandy will use different techniques and positions – always keeping the mother and baby in optimal comfort.

References: 1: *Kate Jordan seminars.com*

2: *The Beneficial Effects of Pregnancy Massage by Kate Jordan, HHP, NCTMB, CSCS*