

# Prenatal Massage

## What is prenatal massage?

Prenatal massage is a kind of massage therapy that is specifically designed for pregnant women throughout all the stages and growth phases of pregnancy.

It is much like a regular massage, but the therapist will be careful to avoid putting pressure on certain areas and will use unique positions to keep the mother comfortable and safe. For example, rather than spending the entire session lying face-down or on your back, you will be on your side. This avoids putting pressure on your abdomen and disrupting blood flow. Cushions and pillows will be used to support your body while you are on your side, and you will switch to your left side after your right side has been massaged. The duration of the session is usually 60 or 90 minutes.

Other modifications include the use of different oils. Essential oils contraindicated during pregnancy are avoided. Rosemary and cinnamon are widely known essential oils for a regular massage, but they must not be used for prenatal massage.

## Why Would I Get a Prenatal Massage

Research shows prenatal massage therapy can help reduce anxiety, decrease symptoms of depression, relieve muscle aches and joint pains, and improve labor outcomes and newborn health. Prenatal massage therapy addresses different needs through varying techniques, one of which is called Swedish Massage.

## How is it applied?

A prenatal massage primarily makes use of the gentle Swedish massage techniques, which provide muscle relaxation to the entire body. The techniques include various types of strokes and movements that are used, which include:

- Friction (small circular movements)
- Effleurage (long gliding strokes)
- Tapotement (percussion movements, brisk tapping)
- Vibration (shaking and rocking movements of specific muscles)
- Petrissage (kneading the muscles)

## Benefits of Prenatal Massage

Here are the most common benefits of prenatal massage:

**Stress Reduction** – The emotional rollercoaster is apparent during pregnancy. Imagine all the stress due to finances, health concerns, and other endeavors. This negative stress can be detrimental to the mother's health if not alleviated accordingly. According to an article published by Complementary



Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery, prenatal massage can reduce the physical symptoms of stress. If you're suffering from the pain of tight muscles and increased pulse, prenatal massage is for you.

**Improve Sleep** – One of the most common sentiments of pregnant women is the difficulty to sleep at night. It is apparent to multiple studies that massage in general, including prenatal massage, can help alleviate physical symptoms like sciatica for better sleep.

**Reduces Swelling** – Women during pregnancy may find themselves swelling a little bit but great thing massage can help ease the burden.

**Improves Circulation** – Whether you are pregnant or not, massage is known for its benefit for improving circulation since its practice. By improving circulation, pregnant moms can benefit from the delivered nutrients and oxygen to the body. In fact, the more nutrients and oxygen your baby receives, the better they can grow and develop.

**Stabilizes Hormones** – Pregnant women may feel under the weather, but prenatal massage is a go-to solution to reduce the stress hormone, cortisol and increase endorphins.

**Relieves Headache** – Hormonal shifts during pregnancy can lead to an increase in headaches. Pregnant women who often experience this can seek prenatal massage to reduce the headache frequency.

**Alleviate Heartburn** – The struggle of pregnancy heartburn isn't easy. That's why prenatal massage comes into play to relieve heartburn by relaxing the nervous system and reducing stomach pressure.

**Improves Nerve Pain** – A study published in Acupuncture in Medicine states that massage relieves nerve pain. Since the muscle is loosened, the muscle is less likely to press on the nerve and cause pain.

**Relieves Lower Back Pain** – Lower back pain is common for women during pregnancy. Relaxed ligaments and sciatica contribute to this pain, but a prenatal massage can help improve these symptoms.

**Makes Delivery Easier** – A study published by The Expert Review of Obstetrics and Gynecology noted that women who received a prenatal massage regularly had shorter labors and less demand for pain medication. This is likely because of lowered stress levels.

## Is it safe to get a massage while pregnant?

The short answer: Yes, it's most likely safe.

Of course, let your doctor know that you're thinking of getting a massage, either from your partner or a professional, before you go ahead and get one.

But in general, massage is considered safe after the first trimester. You might want to avoid massage before then because it can make you dizzy or nauseous — and you probably don't want to make your morning sickness worse inadvertently. Some massage practitioners won't give a massage in the first trimester because they worry it could cause a miscarriage, but there is little medical evidence suggesting this is true

Just be sure to let your partner or therapist know if something hurts while they're massaging you and to let them know how much pressure feels good.

## Areas to avoid massaging during pregnancy

First things first: Massaging certain acupressure points is rumored to trigger miscarriage or preterm labor. No evidence supports this belief, but studies show it may decrease the length and painfulness of labor.

Additionally, your pregnant body should be positioned and supported differently than a non-pregnant person's — for your comfort and so that your baby is safe in utero. During your massage, you should be lying on your side — not your back or stomach — or sitting upright or in a semi-reclining position.

Why is this? For starters, lying on your stomach is uncomfortable. In addition, lying on your back after 20 weeks could put pressure on blood vessels, including your aorta and inferior vena cava, which can restrict blood flow. This in turn can cause your blood pressure to drop and decrease blood flow to your uterus.

*You may also want to be careful on certain parts of your body:*

**Your belly.** You'll probably want to avoid having your growing belly and the area around it massaged because this could hurt you or the baby. It's OK to gently rub some stretch mark cream into your belly, though.

**Your legs.** It's fine to rub or stroke your legs gently, but make sure that your partner or therapist doesn't use too strong of deep tissue pressure. Because your blood volume increases when you're pregnant, blood flow in your legs can slow down, making you prone to clots. So deep tissue massage on your legs could dislodge a clot.

**Pressure points.** As we hinted at above, in reflexology, you have pressure points in some regions of your body, like your wrist, ankle, or between your fingers. Some people say that massaging these areas may cause contractions, but there's currently no evidence to support the claims.

## Contraindications

Contraindications are circumstances in which harm could be caused by a specific treatment, medication, or other intervention.

Massage is contraindicated when a person has certain medical conditions or under specific scenarios, especially during pregnancy, including

- Bleeding disorders
- Taking blood thinners
- Thrombocytopenia (low platelet level)
- Healing skin (from burns, wounds, or other types of skin breakdown)
- Deep vein thrombosis (blood clots)

- Fractures (broken bones)
- Infections
- Osteoporosis (a condition that involves progressive bone thinning)
- Taking certain medications
- Uncontrolled hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Recent surgery or organ transplant

## Pregnancy-Specific Contraindications

There are also several conditions that are specific to pregnancy that could make it unsafe for a person to have a prenatal massage.

You should not get a pregnancy massage if you have:

- **A high-risk pregnancy:** Certain risk factors make a pregnancy considered high-risk, such as bleeding, pre-term contractions, and preeclampsia.
- **Pre-eclampsia:** A serious complication of pregnancy is a condition called preeclampsia. It usually develops around 20 weeks and involves a dangerous rise in blood pressure and protein in the urine which could cause a stroke or even death.
- **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT):** If a person has a DVT, they may have swelling in the leg where there is a blood clot (thrombus). If the DVT is treated and resolves, a person might be able to have a prenatal massage.
- **Placenta previa, accrete, or abruption:** Conditions that involve the placenta can lead to bleeding.
- **Gestational diabetes mellitus:** High blood sugar levels during pregnancy are not strictly a contraindication to prenatal massage; however, a person will need to get the approval of their doctor and be prepared to check their sugars before taking part.

## Before Prenatal Massage

When you've gotten your doctor's OK and you've found a qualified therapist, there are some steps you can take to ensure you have a positive prenatal massage experience.

- **Try to leave your self-consciousness at the door.** If you are feeling uneasy about your pregnancy body, try to go into your massage reassured that therapists are unbiased and are there to help you feel your best.
- **Speak up.** If you are uncomfortable exposing certain parts of your body, let your therapist know. A professional massage therapist will create a safe environment for the massage and will not force you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable.
- **Drink plenty of water before and after your massage.** Staying hydrated is always important, but the fluids may also help to flush away toxins.

- **Avoid scheduling your appointments more often than weekly.** The general recommendation is that you don't have more than one prenatal massage per week, but you will want to ask your doctor how often is right for you.
- **Take a Warm Shower** before the massage to loosen up your muscles and help put you in a relaxed state. A fresh, clean body will also make the experience more pleasant for your massage therapist.
- **Wear Comfortable Clothing.** Wear loose, comfortable clothing to the massage appointment. This will help you continue to feel relaxed and make the process of undressing easier.

## What To Do After a Prenatal Massage

- Schedule a follow-up massage appointment ...
- Drink plenty of water after the massage ...
- Eat nutritious meals after the massage ...
- Avoid drinking alcohol and coffee ...
- Take a warm bath after the massage ...
- Relax and make sure you get enough sleep ...
- Avoid running or exercising immediately after the massage...
- Do some gentle stretching ...