

Information on Baby Massage Oil for Parents

Skin is the primary conduit to touch which is critical for comfort, development, good health and well-being for baby and parent. Massage nurtures touch, and the process for attachment of baby and bonding for the parent. Skin, as well as a sensory organ, acts as a temperature regulator, hydration manager, waste eliminator and protective barrier – baby's first line of defence.

Baby's skin is precious so I want you to make the best and most appropriate choice of oil for massaging your baby. I have gathered information from various sources in order to help you decide which oil to use both in class and at home.

There are several options for you and there is varying research available into the safety of each for you to consider. You may also have cultural or medical reasons, such as eczema, for choosing the oil which you use to massage your baby.

Why use oil?

Oil in massage is used as a lubricant to help your hands glide over baby's skin without drag or friction. However, you can massage your baby without oil, and even over clothing.

For babies under 4 weeks old the NHS recommends to massage without oil. This is because at birth, the top layer of a baby's skin is very thin and easily damaged. Over the first month (or longer in premature babies), a baby's skin matures and develops its own natural protective barrier.

What oils are generally considered safe to use?

Make sure you use oil that is safe for your baby's skin and if it was to get into their mouth. Babies will tend to chew, suck and gnaw on their hands, feet and the hands of their caregivers. They end up eating the oil. So the use of natural, edible and food-grade fruit or vegetable oil, ideally organic and cold-pressed are recommended as it has fewer impurities, but this is by no means the only choice.

Safe Oils:

- Sunflower oil *
- Grape seed oil
- Fractionated coconut oil (has no smell and does not go off) or regular coconut oil
- Almond oil - botanically, almond is a fruit related to the plum & peach family. It is a tree nut, so do take care (please do not use in class in case of nut allergies in other babies or parents).
- Calendula oil (marigold seeds)

*Sunflower oil is often recommended for baby massage but recent research from the Royal College of Midwives that sunflower oil may also be damaging to skin cells. There is little research and evidence on the use of other oils such as grapeseed and coconut oil.

Vegetable oils can go off, so please throw them out if you notice a smell.

Please note if your baby has special needs, please consult your doctor on your choice of oil, or massage without oil.

What oils should I avoid?

- Mustard oil can have a toxic effect on the skin barrier, causing irritation and potential damage to delicate baby skin.
- Olive oil is not recommended for baby massage because of its high oleic acid content. recent research indicates that olive oil should not be used on a baby's skin as it could affect the infant's immature skin barrier.
- Peanut oil contains proteins that may sensitise a baby to an allergic reaction to peanuts or cause a reaction on a baby's skin.
- Mineral oils or petroleum-based ointments as they are inedible and leave a greasy layer (unless they have been prescribed by your GP as they can be an option for treating skin problems, such as dermatitis and eczema).
- Beware of oils produced for cosmetic purposes. Check the ingredients of branded 'Baby Massage oils'. Typical "massage oils" are not food grade and so not suitable for babies.
- Essential or aromatherapy oils – they mask oil that has gone off and can hinder hormonal connection between mother and child.

Patch testing

Generally, a patch test is advised. We do this in class, but you can test your oil at home. Here's how:

Rub a small amount on an area that your baby cannot further irritate (if irritation occurs) such as the thigh.

If no redness and/or bumps appear after about 20 minutes and/or if your baby does not seem to be having any systemic reaction (check respiration and skin & muscle tone), then you're probably doing fine with the chosen oil.

Is oil provided by Breathing Space Yoga and what should you use in class?

I am continuing to be guided by my training companies To Baby and Beyond, and Birthlight. I am recommending that you choose and bring your own massage oil to class, or use no oil at all if you prefer. However, should you wish to use a nut based oil please use this at home but don't bring it to class in case any of the other babies or parents are allergic.

I do bring along Organic Cold-Pressed Sunflower Oil for parents who wish to use this oil in class and you may take some home.

Research and further information:

There is ongoing research into massage oils for Baby Massage. The research is of varying size and quality. Some research into the use of oils on a baby's skin has not focussed on their use for baby massage but for skincare issues, such as dry skin or eczema. This is important to note because there may be a difference in the effect of using oils in baby massage once a week compared to every day for skincare reasons or for more frequent massage. To find out more start here:

To Baby and Beyond <http://www.tobabyandbeyond.com/news/oils-when-and-what-could-be-used-for-infant-massage>

Birthlight <https://www.birthlight.com/news/birthlight-nurture-and-infant-massage-oils>