

1-3-2001 Bron: Reuters Health Oil massage credited for helping babies grow

Oil massage improves infant's growth and helps them sleep better, researchers from India report.

DELHI, Mar 01 (Reuters Health) - Oil massage is a time-tested method of infant care practiced all over the world and is known to have beneficial effects. "Traditional systems of medicine in India advocate oil massage as an integral part of infant care," Dr. K. N. Agarwal writes in a recent issue of the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*.

Agarwal and his team from the University College of Medical Sciences in Delhi studied the effect of oil massage on 125 healthy infants. The infants were approximately 6 weeks of age and were divided into five groups. Four groups received oil massage with herbal oil, sesame oil, mustard oil, and a mix of mineral oil with vitamin E, respectively. The fifth group served as "control group" and did not receive any massage.

The mothers were taught to massage the legs, back, arms, chest, abdomen, face and head in that order. Oil massage was advised for a total of 10 minutes daily and was continued for 4 weeks.

On completion of the study, the researchers observed that weight, body length, head circumference, girth of arm and leg was increased in the four groups that received oil massage. The most significant increase was seen in the group that received massage with sesame oil. The length, arm and leg girth in this group were 1 centimeter (cm), 0.9 cm and 0.7 cm more than that of the control group, respectively. A significant increase in the blood flow through the femoral artery, the main artery supplying the leg, was also seen in this group.

The investigators also observed that the infants slept better soon after the massage.

The beneficial effects on growth and sleep are probably due to increased blood flow and increase in levels of growth promoting hormones like growth hormone and insulin, the authors explained. Vegetable oils such as sesame oil are best suited for massage as they have a beneficial effect on growth and blood flow, and are better absorbed as compared to mineral oil, Agarwal and colleagues concluded.

SOURCE: *Indian Journal of Medical Research* 2000;112:212-217.