

Description

Nurturing the Pregnant Body

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Published in The Practising Midwife Volume 29 Issue 4 July 2026, Page 13

https://doi.org/10.55975/CMOP7619

Introduction

Pregnancy is a time of profound transformation, during which women may experience significant physical, emotional and psychological change. While the physiological adaptations of pregnancy support fetal growth and development, they can also alter how a woman perceives and relates to her body. Feelings of pride, connection and anticipation may coexist with discomfort or uncertainty as the body changes in unfamiliar ways. Midwives are uniquely placed to support women in developing compassionate and positive relationships with their changing bodies throughout pregnancy.

> Research has also demonstrated that massage therapy during pregnancy may reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and low mood while supporting overall maternal wellbeing.[1]

Touch and oxytocin

Physical touch and massage play an important role in supporting maternal wellbeing,[1] but the positive therapeutic effects of massage are often overlooked.[2] Gentle daily massage of the abdomen or stretching skin can encourage moments of pause and connection, helping women to become more attuned to their bodies and their developing baby. Massage and nurturing touch are also associated with the release of oxytocin, sometimes referred to as the love hormone. Oxytocin contributes to emotional wellbeing, relaxation and social connection, while also playing a central physiological role in labour, birth and breastfeeding.[3] Activities that promote calm, safety and relaxation may therefore offer emotional as well as physical benefits during pregnancy. Research has also demonstrated that massage therapy during pregnancy may reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and low mood while supporting overall maternal wellbeing.[1] Emerging evidence suggests that antenatal bonding behaviours, including touch and focused attention towards the baby, may strengthen maternal-fetal attachment and emotional preparation for parenthood.[1,2]

Routines and rituals

Many women describe pregnancy as a period in which they feel pressure to remain productive despite increasing

physical and emotional demands. Encouraging small rituals of rest and self-care, such as mindful massage in the morning or evening, may help women slow down and reconnect with their changing bodies. Applying nourishing oils or body butters using slow, intentional movements may support skin comfort and suppleness while also providing an opportunity for mindfulness and self-awareness. These practices need not be time-consuming; even brief moments of intentional care may positively influence emotional wellbeing and stress reduction. Women are increasingly mindful of the products they use during pregnancy and may seek reassurance through simplified routines and consciously chosen ingredients.

> Midwives can support informed choice by encouraging women to consider comfort, skin tolerance and personal preference when selecting products for self-care and massage

Certified natural products are often perceived as gentle and supportive during this life stage, particularly when formulated for sensitive or stretching skin. Midwives can support informed choice by encouraging women to consider comfort, skin tolerance and personal preference when selecting products for self-care and massage. Partner involvement in massage or nurturing touch may further support emotional connection during pregnancy and reduce anxiety during labour and birth.[4] Shared touch rituals can encourage communication, reassurance and mutual preparation for the transition to parenthood. Sensitive support from partners and healthcare professionals can help normalise these experiences and promote body acceptance.

Conclusion

Supporting women to nurture their bodies during pregnancy extends beyond physical care alone. Moments of touch, stillness and mindful connection may help women develop confidence, emotional wellbeing and attachment as they prepare for birth and motherhood. Midwives play an important role in validating these experiences and encouraging compassionate self-care during this transformative stage of life. **TPM**

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Date Created
1st July 2026