

Description

Protecting the 4th Trimester: The Power of Massage

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Introduction

The fourth trimester is the transition both the mother and baby enter after birth, emotionally and physically for the first twelve weeks in the postpartum period. Massage and positive touch can play a positive and beneficial role during the fourth trimester.

Physical recovery

For the mother or birthing parent, the physical recovery involves healing from both pregnancy and birth. Supportive midwifery care can help provide education around optimal healing and self-care, key information around pelvic floor recovery, as well as monitoring for any signs deviating from physiological recovery for early treatment, referral to specialist services and early interventions. Some parents may enjoy complementary approaches as part of their wider recovery routine such as Arnica, as a topical application or a homeopathic tablet, alongside appropriate post-natal care.

Rest

Rest where physically possible will help to optimise the recovery process, along with a good balanced diet with protein, minerals, vitamins and nutrients to aid the physical recovery process. Optimising sleep also aids emotional wellbeing and health during the fourth trimester, and this can be supported through prioritising self-care where there is a good support network available.

Emotional wellbeing

Massage therapy dates back as far back as 3,000BCE to soothe and heal injuries. More recently, research has found postnatal massage to be beneficial for both physical aches and pains, along with improving emotional wellbeing and reducing postnatal depression due to the positive benefits of reducing cortisol levels, boosting endorphins and oxytocin release.[1]

Positive touch

For the newborn baby, the fourth trimester is a time of development, growth and life outside of the womb. Promoting positive touch can help both the physical and emotional recovery for both the mother and the baby. Skin-to-skin helps to increase oxytocin levels and reduce cortisol levels in the mother; and continued daily skin-to-skin for the first two months postpartum has been shown to reduce maternal postnatal depression symptoms.[2,3] As midwives, promoting a 'baby moon' can be a simple way to support the fourth trimester transition for parents.

Baby massage

For practitioners who are trained in teaching parents baby massage, there are many benefits supported by research from aiding the maternal-newborn attachment and bond, alleviating postnatal depression symptoms, aiding digestion and promoting sleep. Supporting mums to provide baby massage helps to increase maternal confidence in parenting and can be used either in isolation during the day or alternatively combined with evening routines such as reading a book or after a bath.[4]

Parents should be provided information on how to care for their baby's delicate skin, particularly in the fourth trimester when their protective skin barrier is continuing to develop. Choosing fragrance free and natural products for baby massage are important to help to protect the skin barrier. There is an international certification called NATRUE where only natural ingredients gain certification.[5] Botanical extracts such as calendula, can make excellent baby massage products as it is safe and soothing for newborn skin. **TPM**

> "Promoting positive touch can help both the physical and emotional recovery for both the mother and the baby."

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