

[IMAGE]

Massage to the Rescue

By Elaine Stillerman, LMT

Oh, how exciting! You're pregnant!

But along with the eager anticipation that comes with waiting (for nearly 40 weeks) to meet your little bundle of joy, expectant mothers endure the common aches and pains associated with your growing baby and changing body.

One of the most pleasant and effective ways to reduce these minor discomforts is to get a professional prenatal massage from a certified prenatal massage practitioner. Prenatal massage has many benefits for you and your baby. First of all, massage reduces stress levels. Since very few women go through this major transition without some degree of stress and anxiety, a supportive massage is just what is needed to override the harmful effects of stress. Studies indicate your attitudes and stress levels have a direct consequence on your growing baby. When you are uptight, nervous and anxious, so is your baby. The opposite also is true: When you feel good, relaxed and confident about your pregnancy, your baby is happiest. These benefits continue even after your baby is born.

Pregnant Lady - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark One of the most common complaints during pregnancy is backache. As your pregnancy progresses, your center of gravity shifts forward and the muscles of your lower back compress. Your abdominal muscles weaken, stretch and separate in order to make room for the baby, but this also adds to your lower back discomfort. A professional massage practitioner knows exactly how to release those tight back muscles and advise you how to strengthen your abdominal muscles for increased lumbar support. (Hint: Crunches are the worst exercise you can do during your pregnancy and early postpartum recovery. Abdominal exercises that recruit your transverse abdominis - the deepest of the abdominal muscles - will stabilize your lower back and pelvis and will minimize the abdominal separation [diastasis recti] affecting nearly 90 percent of pregnant women.) Sciatic pain also can be relieved easily with appropriate massage and specific postural stretches.

You also might notice how achy, sore and swollen your legs and feet become, especially during your third trimester or in warm weather. Some of you might have difficulty fitting into your shoes. There is a specific

massage technique called manual lymphatic drainage that eases the congestion in your legs and safely protects against dislodging any blood clots your body might produce. (As a protective mechanism during pregnancy and up to 10 weeks postpartum, your body produces more blood clots to prevent excessive bleeding or hemorrhaging during labor and early recovery. Most of these clots are found in the deeper vessels of your legs and calves. Therefore, deep strokes to your legs are not appropriate during this sensitive time.) A trained professional will understand this and use the light touch of manual lymphatic drainage to make your legs feel wonderful.

Baby - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark While there are no statutes requiring additional education, it is strongly advised that you seek the help of someone who is trained and understands your dynamic anatomy and physiology, along with massage and bodywork techniques most appropriate for you during each trimester. To find a qualified practitioner, get a recommendation from your midwife, obstetrician or a friend of a professional who is certified in prenatal massage from an approved program. You also can go to the MotherMassage national registry for a practitioner near you.

Make sure the practitioner takes a complete medical history before the first massage and employs the essential pretreatment evaluations (for blood clots and pitting edema - a possible sign of pre-eclampsia) prior to each session. You want someone who understands the importance of using manual lymphatic drainage on your legs and can massage you in a variety of comfortable positions on the treatment table, or sitting if necessary.

Most of all, you want to find someone with whom you feel comfortable. It is an honor and a privilege to massage pregnant women and new mothers, and you want to share this journey to parenthood with the right partner.

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