

# Infant massage: bonding and benefits through touch



ERIN NEGLEY | Staff Writer (/staff/erinnegley) 3 hrs ago



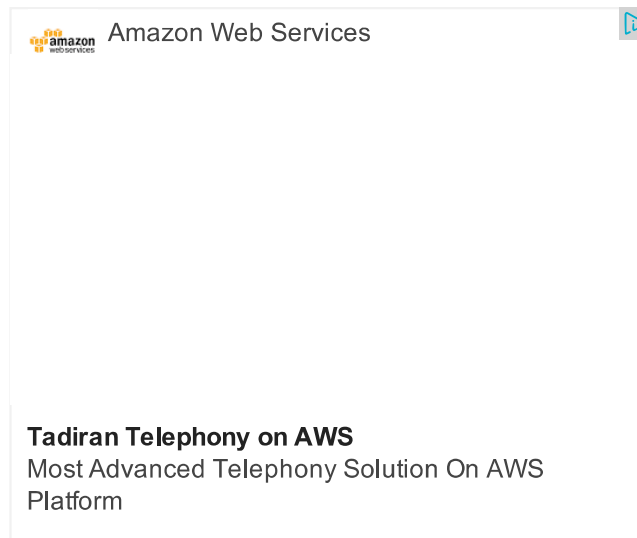
**Suzette Wenger | Staff**

Trisha Martin, a newborn at Heart of Lancaster Regional Medical Center, gets her first massage from a pediatric occi

Amber Sullenberger's first son suffered from colic and reflux. With another son on the way, she wanted a game plan, especially because the reflux is genetic.

So she signed up for a class in infant massage, which can help babies sleep better and handle colic and gas problems.

When Connor was born in November, she practiced the "I Love U" massage on him. She massaged the letter "I" onto the side of his stomach, an upside-down "L" over his belly, and then an upside-down "U."



Mom's hands comforted him and gave him a little release for his reflux. But it was also a perfect excuse to spend some special time with her son.

"It's a really nice bonding technique," said Sullenberger, who lives in Mechanicsburg and works at Schreiber Pediatric Rehab Center. "You're taking time out of your day, just the two of you."

Classes with professionals trained in infant massage help parents know the right techniques, pressure and even the right time and temperament for a massage.

Parents can find local infant massage classes at places such as the Schreiber Center and Heart of Lancaster Regional Medical Center.

Classes usually focus on an infant's first year because once they start walking, it's harder to keep them still for a massage.

Even so, Jerissa Warfel has used her massage lessons with her 4-year-old daughter Nadia, to calm her at bedtime.

"Putting a little bit of pressure on her legs and arms helps," said Warfel, a mother of five who lives in Millersville.

Schreiber started offering classes to the public in the past year, after occupational pediatric therapist Becky Smith became a certified infant massage instructor. She was drawn to the potential wellness benefits of massage.

For example, one baby took medicine two to three times a day for colic and reflux. After massage, the infant's symptoms decreased enough to need only occasional medicine, Smith said.

"That was very exciting," she said.

Infant massage also fits well into the sensory part of occupational therapy. "It's communicating through touch," Smith said.

Massage is not only tactile but also visual and involves other senses, even smell. Scented oils are not recommended because they can mask the natural bodily scent that helps babies identify their mothers.

Plus, the classes fit into the early intervention therapy parents can offer special needs children at home, in addition to the therapy provided by Schreiber.

### **Bonding benefit**


Warfel signed up for the class because she was looking for a memorable bonding experience with her youngest, Hudson. He was the first of her children to have colic, so she was looking for some help with that as well.

She's massaged Hudson two or three times a week for five to 10 minutes, usually after a bath.

Learning the proper pressure was a little scary for Warfel, who was used to being gentle with babies. But that pressure helped Hudson relax and have a better night's sleep as well as connect with mom.



"The best thing that happened through the whole experience was the bonding experience," Warfel said. "The eye-to-eye contact — it's hard to put that into words."


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