

4 PAIN

4.2 THERAPEUTIC TOUCH

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4.2.3 Massage
Section B
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4.2.3 MASSAGE

AIM

To provide a safe, non-invasive, non-pharmacological method to assist in reducing pain and anxiety for women in labour.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Massage is the systematic manipulation of the soft tissues of the body, which includes the muscles, tendons and the skin. It can induce relaxation, and therapeutically can prevent muscle contraction, tension and fatigue. Massage has been used for improving lymphatic and blood circulation.¹

Two randomised controlled studies have investigated the effect of massage on labour pain. One study looked at massage conducted by the woman's partner. It found that the woman's anxiety and pain was reduced and her mood improved.² The other study concluded that massage was a cost-effective intervention that could be implemented by midwives. Women perceived a reduction in their pain and anxiety levels, and found that with partner involvement they had a more positive birth experience.^{2,3} (Level II)

KEY POINT

There is insufficient evidence regarding the benefits or effectiveness of massage to reduce labour pain.⁴ (Level 1).

CONTRAINDICATIONS TO MASSAGE¹

Massage is contraindicated in these situations:

- fractures in the area to be massaged
- varicose veins, poor skin integrity, and/or skin lesions
- low platelet count or susceptibility to bruising
- skin hypersensitivity
- unexplained/undiagnosed swelling under the skin

MANAGEMENT

1. Obtain verbal consent prior to touching or massaging a woman in labour.
2. Ensure the woman has no allergies to oils or creams that are used. Vegetable oils are preferable.¹

3. Provide towels and blankets to keep the woman warm during massage.¹

REFERENCES

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4. Smith CA, Collins CT, Cyna AM, Crowther CA. Complementary and alternative therapies for pain management in labour. **The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews**. 2006(4).