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RESEARCH

Massage Favorably Adjusts Infants' Rest-Activity Cycle

Infants who were massaged before bedtime adjusted to a more favorable rest-activity cycle by the age of 8 weeks and produced more melatonin, a sleep regulator, during the night by the age of 12 weeks, according to a recent study.

"Massage Therapy by Mothers Enhances Adjustment of Circadian Rhythms to the Nocturnal Period in Full-Term Infants" was conducted by Sari Goldstein Ferber, Ph.D., Moshe Laudon, Ph.D., Jacob Kuint, M.D., Aron Weiler, Ph.D., and Nava Zisapel, Ph.D.

Twenty-one mother-infant pairs were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the treatment group, in which mothers massaged their infants before bedtime, or the control group, in which there was no intervention.

Mothers in the treatment group were instructed to get their babies ready for bed between 8-9 PM, and to provide 30 minutes of massage therapy to the infant every day for 14 days, starting when the infants were 10 days old.

The massage consisted of light, circular strokes of the baby's back with one hand, while touching the baby's head with the other hand. After 14 days, the massage was discontinued.

Both groups restricted light in the baby's room to the hours of 6 AM - 8 PM.

Actigraph measures, which monitor the number of movements per minute, were taken at 6 and 8 weeks of age. Mothers placed an actigraph Velcro belt on one of their infant's legs for a 20-hour recording period.

Activity levels of the groups were compared during five four-hour time spans: 11 PM - 3 AM, 3 - 7 AM, 7 - 11 AM, 11 AM - 3 PM, and 3 - 7 PM. Diaries accounted for movement during diaper changes or other events, and actigraph readings for these time periods were discarded.

At 8 weeks, infants in the massage group experienced peak activity from 3 - 7 AM, while peak activity of infants in the control group happened from 11 PM - 3 AM.

A secondary peak of activity for infants in the massage group was 3 - 7 PM. For infants in the control group, it was 11 AM - 3 PM.

"The activity hours of the treated infants may be more supportive of maternal well-being compared with the activity hours of the nontreated controls, as they seem better adjusted to the mother's schedule," state the study's authors.

Urinary excretion of 6-sulphatoxymelatonin at night was evaluated. Excretion of this substance reflects the production of the hormone melatonin, a sleep regulator and time cue in humans. Diapers used by the infants during the night (7 PM - 8 AM) were collected and analyzed at ages 6, 8 and 12 weeks.

At 12 weeks, the nocturnal urinary excretion of 6-sulphatoxymelatonin was significantly greater in the treated infants compared to the control group.

"Practitioners may be advised to instruct mothers to provide behavioral presleep massage treatment in early infant care, because the results strongly indicate that this may have long-term, beneficial effects on development of properly phase-adjusted rhythmicity," state the study's authors.

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- **Source:** Tel Aviv University departments of neonatology and neurobiochemistry in Tel Aviv, Israel; Neurim Pharmaceuticals Ltd.; and the Bar Ilan University Department of Psychology. Authors: Sari Goldstein Ferber, Ph.D., Moshe Laudon, Ph.D., Jacob Kuint, M.D., Aron Weller, Ph.D., and Nava Zisapel, Ph.D. Originally published in the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, December 2002, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 410-415.

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