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A Massage Therapist Guide to Prenatal & Postnatal for Families.



Preface & Acknowledgments

Preface

Over a decade of experience has gone into writing this guide for not only the women who will be giving birth but for the family and friends who will each have their own part in the starting or growth of a family. Over the years it's been my privilege to work with hundreds of women and their families through this unique and wonderful time in their lives. Some might say that men have no place in this experience to which I would say anyone who is willing to learn and have an open heart with the correct training should be allowed to do this kind of work and support this work. This might not answer all of your questions as you read it but it should get you a lot further in the right direction. May this journey be a happy time for everyone involved.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to acknowledge that everyone that has gotten onto my table over the years has taught me something about this work that means that every woman and every family has contributed in some way to this guild. It is only through proper education and experience I have been able to write any of this today to hopefully help introduce you to this wonderful experience.

Basic Questions

Why is Massage Important Throughout Pregnancy?

I have used this analogy for years and I consider to be one of the most accurate that I have ever come up with. The amount changes both physically and emotionally that a woman can go through a pregnancy is more rapid and more difficult than an olympic athlete. When you think about the moment of conception until the two-year period after the babies born a woman's body will go through more changes with more emotional and physical stressors happening and an extremely rapid pace than an olympic athlete would go through in the same period of time. To say that pregnancy is jarring in my opinion would be a vast understatement. Massage is something that will help a mother physically and emotionally adjust as things change over time just as they would for an athlete looking for a sports massage for example. Growing another human being or multiple human beings at the same time is an amazing thing. There are many physical changes that take

place within a woman's hormones, muscles, connective tissue, weight that massage therapy can help ease the transitions through while providing a space for emotional wellbeing.

Is Getting Massage During Pregnancy Safe?

Prenatal massage is safe if done by a practitioner who has been properly trained. This goes above the standard massage therapy school training and is usually done in a continuing education course or series of courses. The reason the additional education is necessary is to insure that the therapist understands the dangers of holding or massaging certain points repeatedly on the body that can cause hormone changes or possibly induce miscarriage or labor. The other major reason for all of this training is to make sure that the practitioner knows how positioning and cushioning effects mother and child at each stage of pregnancy.

Other things that people would consider relatively minor dangers could be very problematic for pregnant women such as certain aromas or creams with particular additives or preservatives that the therapist must know in order for massages to be safe. Even the type of detergent used on the sheets can affect women during pregnancy it is very important to understand what those things are before the client ever gets on the table. Look at the next section for qualities you want to find in a prenatal therapist.



When Should I Start Getting Massages?

The first thing you should do before getting any prenatal services scheduled is to make sure that your doctor is aware it's something you'd like to do. If there are any concerns that they have please hear them out. You never know what things your doctor might be concerned about thinking about your particular health needs. Most prenatal therapists in the United States will typically request that you wait until the end of the first trimester to schedule anything, this is done for several reasons the most important being that the baby tends to settle in during the first trimester. Most miscarriages take place in the first trimester so it only makes sense to wait. At this point it is worth pointing out that many women do not realize that they were pregnant for several weeks and make it a standard massage during that time. This will not necessarily increase your risk of miscarriage. It would be the

equivalent of having a few drinks of alcohol or smoking a cigarette weeks before you know you're actually pregnant and then choose to stop those activities. This tends to be the nature of pregnancy and so any woman or family member who gets the news of a new pregnancy and thinks they may have done things in the recent past that may hurt the child there should be a level of understanding and consideration. In most cases the side effects long-term are minimal.

Prenatal massage can be done up until the day of birth as long as there are no complications that arise but should end as soon as a person's water breaks. Just because you did not get your first prenatal service right at the end of the first trimester does not mean you can't jump in at any point and enjoy the benefits. For those that might be interested or concerned I have never had someone have their water break while on the table even during an induction process (the term induction process is used to indicate a form of bodywork in prenatal that happens between week 37 and beyond that intentionally hit points that will cause hormone shift hopefully leading to a successful delivery, this is often done as an alternative to using labor inducing drugs).

Finding That Therapist

Finding a prenatal therapist is even more intimate in my opinion than finding a regular massage therapist for when you're not pregnant and there are a couple of big important reasons for this: no other form of massage is there two people that a massage therapist must look out for and the impact of doing the service is amplified as a result that means that every stroke and every movement carries much greater weight. I personally believe that every mother knows that instinctively and knows that this is a new level of intimacy and that there are strong boundaries that result. A good prenatal therapist should have an appreciation and respect for that boundary it should make you feel like it is in the environment and how they perform their services that gives the mother and child a space to explore that intimacy and boundary together.

What qualifications should I be looking for?

Any therapist that you look for first of all should have a certification to do prenatal work. Every therapist you interview should have a certification document and on that document should be the name of the accreditation firm. Most massage therapists do not directly advertise their certifications in full but you have the right to ask to see their certification. Most prenatal certifications at least at the time of this document being published do not have expiration dates. I suggest asking if they have gone back for a second certification several years apart (just in case things have changed). If a massage therapist tells you that they were trained in school I would only continue the conversation

if they work for a reputable franchise business. This means not only that they carry private insurance for liability reasons but they also have professional insurance through that franchise business owner. Many franchises now require their staff to perform prenatal services to go through their accredited training program in prenatal massage this should be equivalent to a continuing education certificate. This is also a great time to talk to other people who have had prenatal experiences and who they used a reference can go along way towards easing someone's mind and is one of the major drivers of good experiences in my opinion is referrals. A final important note in regards to post natal training that is there is currently no post natal coursework for certification. It is typically done as part of the prenatal massage certification program but it's not always included in every program so it is important to ask if their prenatal training also included some post natal training.

What question should I be asking?

As discussed previously it's important to find out if they have a continuing education certificate in prenatal massage. The next question I might ask is their years of experience. I would ask them what equipment they are using during their prenatal sessions. The correct answer should be professional bolsters or traditional pillows. I would ask them some questions about when should you come in for sideline service compared to a face down service and what trimester that should happen. They should tell you if they have any kind of skill or not or the certification they're discussing because there's only two correct answers (you should come in during the second or third trimester and you should be in the sideline position (the exception being a prenatal table which means you can be face down until the start of the third trimester). Lastly I would ask them what their overall philosophy about prenatal massage is. If you don't get the feeling you are not getting a confident answer it would worry me a little bit that something that every therapist should be able to say off the top of their head with sincerity and professionalism.

What is a Fair Price?

The most reasonable price should be about 20% higher than a standard massage service in the same location. There are rare exceptions where it could be the same price as a standard session but this is very rare. The reason for the additional charge is that additional equipment is required and many times if there is a last-minute cancellation due to medical issues or other family issues at the time the late cancellation policy is waived. Many businesses choose to charge a higher rate for that reason. Finally many therapists demand a pay bump for having the additional skills which requires schooling and depending on where in the United States you are or another countries

there may be an additional insurance liability above what other massage therapist would need to pay and that should be accounted for because it's typically not paid by the employer but by the professional themselves.

Trust Your Gut.

I cannot say this enough: trust your gut if you feel like something does not sound right or anything does not feel like a good fit for you don't need to move forward with scheduling a service. Never feel bad about something you can't put your finger on, your therapist will not judge. This is also an important time to mention that choosing of the prenatal therapist should be done by the person carrying the child. If you want to give the gift of prenatal work purchase gift cards or a prenatal package for a specific business that has multiple therapists who are prenatal therapists so that the person carrying the child can choose.

Planning for Prenatal

Overview

To start this portion I wanted to do a general overview of what a typical session is like. Often times I think it makes sense to tell people about what's typical and allow the individual therapist who you will be seeing you fill in any gaps. Overall, the goal for every service should be a mix of physical relief and mental relaxation. This is a time to shut out the world and be cared for.

Most massage therapist will ask you to make an appointment several days in advance to several weeks in advance if it's your first visit from that point on it's preferable to make a new appointment before you leave the current appointment. You'll come in and typically will find the table ready for you which means it should have a little bit of extra warmth in the room to keep you comfortable and some cushions so that you can slip into the table easily and have the support you will need. Your therapist will want to ask you if anything has changed and that's called pre-chat. Your therapist may ask oh ask if you're having any particular aches and pains from the last time they saw you or what your current physical pain level is in please answer this very honestly because it will have an impact on how the session goes and the results you can yield from it.

After the pre-chat is completed the therapist will instruct you to get onto the table and address to your comfort level. Comfort level is different for everyone but if you want them to use lotion or

cream it's recommended that you remove your bra but leave your underwear on. If your feet get cold it's also ok to leave your socks on.

There may be a point where the therapist will undrape you and this will be different from a regular massage session in that it will most likely be a triangular drape starting out the shoulder closest to the ceiling to the edge of the underwear line at your hip straight down towards the table and most likely tucked into the table. Your arm maybe used to hold the sheet in proper position without exposing your chest on the other side this is a standard practice.

Many therapists will want to have you turn on the other side and this can be done gently and safely just follow their instructions. Typically this will begin by removing the bolsters and holding the sheet and allowing you to turn and then re-inserting those bolsters.

Finally when you reach the end of the service they're going to remind you to take your time getting up and many of them will strongly advise you to throw the cushions off the table and away from you so that you can see them when you get up. It is not uncommon for you to have the urge to go to the bathroom during the service or after the service is over this is expected. If for any reason during the service you need to use the bathroom let them know immediately so that they can provide your privacy and space to dress yourself or put yourself in a robe to use the bathroom. Don't be embarrassed in the least and most often if you can do this in a reasonable period of time your session time will not be affected. Once you've dressed make sure to let your therapist know they can come in and many times to be a discussion about what happened that day and what you should experience next time you arrive. Most often the massage therapist will know what aches and pains are going to increase and decrease over the next several weeks to months as the baby grows.

Safety Checks

During the pre-chat phase of your session you should also have three standard test completed before you ever get on the table. These tests have been used for decades as a standard safety protocol. The first of the safety checks involves asking the question have you had any vaginal bleeding that your doctors consider unusual? Sometimes bleeding can happen and it should be talked about during your checkups. The second is about swelling in the legs: your therapist will normally check this themselves before you get on the table. This is often called edema or pitted edema. The final check is to ask about harsh or erratic pre-birth contractions that are often called practice contractions. They should happen as part of a normal pregnancy but if they are very

intense or coming in earlier than normal then massage should wait until they are checked by your doctor.

Timetable

As stated in the past several times most massage therapist that do prenatal's will not see someone until after the start of their second trimester but can see them for their first session up until just before they give birth. As far as how long a session should last anywhere between 60 and 90 minutes.

Hygiene & Clothing

For those that have prior experience with massage just wear clothings that will be easy to take off during pregnancy. That is really the short answer. For those who do not get regular massages let me break things down a little more for you. Please take a shower or bath before coming to your session and if possible use a brush for your back and other hard to reach places. Please use lotion because this can really slow down your session if the therapist spends most of their time trying to get a good glide (think massaging a piece of toast with a stick of butter). Please also know that 90% of all massage therapists could care less if you have not shaved your legs because we know that will become harder during pregnancy. In terms of clothing your choice should be easy to remove and put back on. There are a lot reasons for dressing that way most importantly being time, if it take too long to get dressed then your time is being wasted. Please don't wear too many accessories that also need to be taken on and off like rings, necklaces, and obtrusive fashion based items like fashion belts. Underwear is normally left on but a bra should be removed to ease of access to your back. It should also be noted in the section that some prenatal massage therapist and doulas will suggest they should be able to massage your stomach at least lightly. This is a very personal space and should only be touched if the person carrying the child is comfortable with that, it is never required (there is no known benefit scientifically for this practice).

How Much Time Should I Schedule Versus How Long my Session is?

Sessions during the second trimester should be anywhere between 30 minutes to 90 minutes depending on which therapist you choose and the concerns you may have. During third trimester it's recommended to do no more than an hour for a couple of different reasons the most important

thing is that many women cannot longer go a full 90 minutes without using a bathroom because the baby will be compressing the bladder. I encourage mothers to give themselves travel time +15 minutes before and after their session. It is better to be a little early and get on the table early if possible than to run late and be more stressed.

What Should I Bring with Me?

Every massage therapist is a little different on what they will allow being brought into their room. But in general there always should be a couple of things available to you or things you should ask if you can bring if you choose.

1. A baby blanket that the baby will use once they are born. You can continue to add your body smells to the blanket during your pregnancy and another great way to use it is during your prenatal session.
2. In many cases in the sideline position often a therapist will give you a body pillow to hold onto. In addition to that you can also bring a stuffed animal or something else that might provide you emotional comfort. This may help you settle into the table better and relax more deeply.
3. Some women will choose to bring in their own special music which in most cases is just fine. Typically the limitation is the format that being a compact disc or tape or even a record make sure that your therapist has the ability to play that for you. In other cases people have asked about bringing in some kind of aromatherapy. In this regard many aromatherapy items are not recommended during pregnancy speak to your doctor before using any kind of aromatherapy during your pregnancy many massage therapists are trained not to allow them in.
4. Your coparent! Yes, your coparent can (in many cases) learn from the therapist safe ways to massage those tight areas. Many men are excluded from the more intimate parts of the pregnancy and so working with mom can feel very intimidating. If the therapist allow and will show them where they can work and how that will feel many men can become very helpful between massage appointments.

Planning for Postnatal

What is Postnatal and How will it Fit into my Life?

Postnatal massage is a form of massage that specializes in the care of mother will need in the time span from the time the babies born to two years old. This period of time presents numerous challenges to a new family not only physically but emotionally. This is a form of specialty massage that is sometimes tied to massage therapist who also learn prenatal as well. A prime example of the unique skill set would be understanding and treating frozen shoulder that comes from holding the baby during nursing or bottle feeding. Another example would be when the baby holds onto their parents or parent when they are in the 40 pound range as they do daily activities this can cause strain not only in the shoulder but also in the hip as well as many times the adult will brace the weight of the child on the hip bone. The specific challenges also can address some of the other physical needs including understanding and helping parents relax after a long period of no sleep.

For many people that read this portion it almost seems like this would be a luxury considering that up until the modern era many parents didn't have this as an option. That this form of massage work is unnecessary or that it would be considered a selfish indulgence. I would personally disagree with this and here is why: in the modern era we have seen the advent of some very interesting technologies. Let's take an example of power tools used in the kitchen like a mixer or a power drill used in the garage. Both of these items are not necessary in order to complete a task there are older tools that we can use and still get the job done but what we have learned is that repetitive injuries from using these item can be better documented today than any other time in human history and yet we have this very reasonable alternative that many of us choose to except and embrace. To that end we have a form of massage therapy that can help families better deal with the physical and emotional stressors that come from having a new child. We know more now than we did before and so this new therapy is here. Do we need it? The answer is not really as a necessity however it is very convenient and can prevent a lot of problems. Why not embrace this? If it leads to a better long-term outcome for the family and the child then why not use that extra expense if it's possible.

How Soon After Birth Should I Schedule One?

There is some controversy about this particular topic in regards to how soon after birth can someone come in for a massage. I'd like to try and simplify the arguments that can be found in the many paper and digital sources. From a medical perspective and it's contraindications to massage most modern training in prenatal and postnatal bodywork suggest that we follow the same guidelines that we would use for any surgical procedure. The general rule is 4 to 6 weeks with most

therapists siding in the 6 week category. Sooner for those who had a vaginal birth. If you have a C-section with no complications 5 to 6 weeks is typically recommended as there needs to be time for the skin to re-tighten and heal. For those that have had significant complications in either vaginal or C-section including an extensive amount of blood loss 6 to 7 weeks is recommended with a doctors note thereafter.

When is the Best Time to Schedule a Session Within the Day?

As a note from me the author to all of you reading this I think it's important that I interject a little bit of my own experience into this portion to give you a sense of what it's like to be a therapist on the other side of scheduling postnatal work. Hopefully in some way you can take something out of it that you can use. As a young therapist in the modern American industry of massage the most undesirable shifts for staff members are nights, weekends, holidays. Most people in the general public would assume night would be the busiest times and why not work during those times to make the most money? The truth is that many people that work in the service and healthcare and even the construction industry try very hard with her employers to create some kind of balance so that you're not away from your family every single night and every single holiday and every single weekend because most of the world still does not operate on a 9 to 5 Monday through Friday schedule.

I will say in favor of not only the clients in the businesses scheduling sessions especially for young families can be challenging for some families getting away from a newborn or a young child in the morning works best and for some the late evening works best. My suggestion is that you look at your family needs and see what your local area provides in terms of availability of those therapists during those days and times. You might find more limited options based on what is available but that doesn't necessarily mean you have to sacrifice the quality of the therapist or of the experience. I cut my teeth in the massage industry and post natal massage work because the only jobs I could get would hire for nights holidays and weekends only. So many of my mothers would come in between the hours of 7 AM and 9 PM and they would schedule approximately one hour service. This gave them approximately 2 to 2 1/2 hours in total away from their child while they were first drifting off to sleep but before their first feeding is required. If there happened to be a coparent in the home it was often a time as well that they would be getting home and settled in where they could handle a baby on their own for a short period of time. If this kind of arrangement sounds good to you the most important thing I can tell you is that if you get prenatal work talk about your therapist in terms of post natal work with your family and with the therapist themselves to make

sure they have the training and experience to help you. If they for some reason do not have the training or availability that you and your family may need they should be able to provide you with a reasonable alternative person to help you. This entire discussion does not in anyway mean that you are required to get postnatal massage work after the babies born you can go to a regular massage therapist who does not do postnatal work as long as you are in a minimum timeframe away from birth which would be 4 to 7 weeks.

Final Thoughts

I hope that the information provided to you and your family helps in this journey of a lifetime. This is always meant to be a general guide for the general public please take the time to discuss this topic openly with those you love and care about and those medical professionals qualified to discuss it.

Doing this work as a practitioner has been a very enriching experience and it is the hope of every practitioner that I've ever met that they want to enrich your life as well and that of your new family so please always remember to be honest and open to this new part of your life and know that you are not alone. There is a great deal of good in the world and I hope that the birth of this new family member will bring you joy and happiness.