

Luxuriating for Two

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The standard morning sickness and swollen ankles aside, pregnancy can be a euphoric experience for moms-to-be, and it's a time that should be celebrated with as much pampering of the mother as of that little miracle growing inside her. It's a symbiotic relationship - happy Mom, happy baby. At a time when her concerns are entirely focused on her precious cargo, pregnant women and certainly new moms needs to have some attention lavished on themselves. Where better to do that than the spa? Specific massage techniques for pregnant women and new mothers can make all the difference through the emotional and physical complexities of pregnancy and childbirth.

“Pre- and post-natal massage has gained in popularity as women have become more spa-savvy, especially for those who have spent time at the spa before becoming pregnant,” says Denise Haug, Sales Consultant for SpaEquip, Inc. and former spa director. “They are realizing the positive benefits of what relaxing spa treatments tailor-made for pregnancy and new motherhood can do for them. Before the baby is born, pregnancy massage provides support for the mom-to-be by easing the effects of physical and emotional strain on her body. It also increases circulation and reduces the stress on weight-bearing joints as well as improving the overall experience of labor. After the delivery, post-natal massage helps the body to recover from the stress of childbirth and also helps tissues to constrict more quickly.”

Crucially, there are special considerations for pregnant women where massage is concerned, as Luciana LoPresto, Licensed Massage Therapist and Spa Consultant for SpaCasa, explains: “Pre/post natal spa treatments require that the massage therapist is well-versed in side-lying massage techniques and ideally certified in prenatal massage. Most massage schools offer a short course in this modality. I make sure to review and offer additional training to my spa staff. Most important is understanding safety procedures: After the first trimester, moms- to-be should not be supine (lying on their spine) as their superior vena cava can become compressed – which is the blood supply to the baby. Tilt (esthetician) tables are recommended or a wedge pillow to elevate the head, keeping it higher than the waist and breastbone.”

Peggy Francis, a spa consultant based in Napa, California, agrees on the absolute importance of expertise: “First, the therapist should be trained in pregnancy massage and know the contraindications for both pre-natal and post-natal massage. The therapist should also ask if there are any special conditions that should be taken into consideration during the massage and what the client's goals are for the session. If products are being used, it is very important to check for contraindications. Support for the body is essential for the comfort of the client. A body cushion system provides the flexibility to customize the support throughout the pre and post natal period. A massage table that allows for the head of the table to be raised is wonderful for the last trimester when lying

flat is uncomfortable. Massage during pregnancy helps relieve muscle aches and pains, increases circulation and reduces stress; great for Mom and the unborn baby. So a thorough massage with special attention to neck, shoulders and lumbar is effective in reducing the muscle tension associated with pregnancy and childbirth.”

The popularity of massages for the pregnant and the newly-offspringed is on the rise, as more and more women have become aware of the spa experience in general. Due to increased spa accessibility and affordability for a wider population of women than was the case in years and decades past, women view the spa experience as less exotic and more just a normal part of their self-care, especially when their bodies and their lives are going through this momentous change.

Luciana LoPresto is a living example of how beneficial natal massage can be: “Pre/post spa treatments are more popular now because our spa guests are more ware of the benefits the spa offers. Working moms need time out more than ever to rest and relieve pressures on their changing bodies. My ob-gyn was constantly surprised by my lack of prenatal discomforts. My standard response was, “Regular prenatal massage and a daily yoga practice!”

“In today’s society women lead busy lives with career, family and community responsibilities,” adds Peggy Francis. “Many continue the steady pace throughout their pregnancy, often returning to work shortly after giving birth. Massage is one of the health practices that enables a woman to maintain a sense of balance as she moves through the birth process and the post natal period.”

Denise Haug recalls a very popular treatment: “I created a treatment at the WELL Spa that was called ‘Nirvana Mama.’ This consisted of several essential oils blended by the therapist, chosen according to the client’s preferences), placed into a warm oil or lotion and used for the massage.

The client was placed on her side and standard-sized pillows were used to support her body comfortably. Gentle strokes on the body in a flowing motion were used by the massage therapist to soothe her. Gentle body balancing finished off this treatment along with a hot towel foot wrap. The feedback was phenomenal. We did this in-room at the hotel for the ultimate experience and it was often done after a baby shower, in the evening just before the mother turned in.”

The position in which a natal massage takes place is essential for safety and comfort. Luciana LoPresto advises: “It is important to explain to moms-to-be and nursing moms that they will be more comfortable (and it is safer for baby) to be side-lying. Nestled in pillows makes them feel nurtured and pampered, and most moms-to-be are simply so grateful just to be off their feet and getting some nurturing attention of their own! Also, nursing moms may feel uncomfortable or leak from compression in a prone position.

Safety in Numbers

There are contraindications for certain types of treatments at certain periods in the pregnancy of which every spa staff needs to be aware. The first, second and third trimesters have different signatures, and what may be comforting and relaxing in one may make the client downright sick in another. Here is an overview:

First Trimester

The early weeks of pregnancy are not always rosy and this is when morning sickness and sheer anxiety over what is to come are most prevalent, especially for first-time mothers. The spa staff should always ask in which trimester the client is at the time of her appointment, and be careful to avoid very strongly-scented treatments that could trigger upset stomachs. Any chemical-based treatments must not be applied to the body or hair during this critical period of the baby's development. Be sure to ask of any allergies or sensitivities to certain substances, herbal or not. Massage, facials and pedicures, however, can work wonders with moms-to-be who are not feeling their best during this first phase of their pregnancy.

Second Trimester

The second trimester is often when the "glowing" starts and the expectant mom is riding the happy Progesterone Wave - it's often the most joyous and comfortable time of the pregnancy, and a great spa experience can only add to the radiance. Even though, in this middle phase, the belly hasn't quite reached the size of Jupiter yet, a side-lying position for massage is still essential to the safety and comfort of the client. Massage strokes should be kept lighter and more gentle to avoid possible complications with varicose veins, and there are particular pressure points that are associated with contractions, so it is crucial that the technician knows to avoid those points during the massage. A facial will just blow the lid off the glowing, but the right position is important while the treatment is being administered (she cannot be supine or flat on her back), and any products used are absorbed through the skin, they DO enter the bloodstream, and that can affect the baby, so they should be limited to very safe, organic products with no heavy chemical content.

Third Trimester

It's Jupiter time, and being able to see the lower regions of the body is a distant memory. The feet as well as the belly are swollen beyond recognition, and it is these nether-regions that need the most help at this point. A pedicure, even though she might never see it, will reassure that her feet will look their very best through all that pushing on the big day (one less thing to worry about), and a soothing, very gentle body scrub to lessen the itching and discomfort that goes along with all that expansion can be very luxurious.

Treatments to avoid completely for pregnant women

Saunas, mud baths, wraps or any other treatment that raises the body temperature should never be suggested for a pregnant woman - they can be very dangerous to both mother and baby. Laser hair removal and electrolysis should also be avoided, as it is not clear what effect the electrical currents used in these procedures has on the baby.

More than massage

There is much room for luxury here that goes beyond a massage for the jangled nerves of a new mom or an expectant future mom. Peggy Francis makes this suggestion: "Changes in the skin often come with pregnancy. Dry brushing and/or exfoliation removes dead skin which allows the massage oil to better nourish the skin. A soothing application of balm gently applied over the belly helps reduce stretch marks, as well. Post-natal massage is when true 'pampering' is required and will be greatly appreciated. Sleep-deprived new mothers need the rest, relaxation and the caring attention massage provides. Apply warm compresses to the back and feet, place the eye pillow over her eyes, use the body support system to protect sensitive areas, and all the little details will encourage and guide Mom to relax and let go. Stress-free mothering is a gift for the entire family - everyone benefits."

Peggy Francis continues, "Don't forget the opportunity to engage friends and family. Pre and post natal are tender times that require support from others. Suggest gift certificates for spa services for the mom to be. Help friends organize a group spa day to celebrate the coming event or the birth. It's a great way for loved ones to share in the celebration, and new fathers need to relax, too!"

Other therapies are proving to help both mother and baby pre-natally. "One of the various proven pre-natal therapies for moms-to-be and their unborn children is music therapy," says Kasia Siwulec, Manager of Spa Shawnee and Salon at the Shawnee Inn and Golf Resort in Delaware, PA. "Listening to music involves many different parts of the brain. The left side recognizes the rhythm and pitch of the notes; while the right side recognizes tone and melody. Everyone reacts differently to the sounds; the right music can bring peace and let you concentrate on a specific project. In adults, music therapy influences the brain, nervous system, blood pressure, hormone production, pulse, breathing, and mental balance.

For newborns and prenatal babies, contact with music starting at the earliest days of their lives teaches them harmony, rhythm, and increases the sensitivity and flexibility of their nervous system. Japanese neurologists proved that listening to music in early childhood influences future sensitivity to sounds. It is also proven that music helps to build nerve connections responsible for the development of language, memory, and equilibrium.

Research shows that the first sound a baby hears starting by the 6th week is the mother's heartbeat. By the 26th week, she/he can hear rhythm and melody, so the more sounds babies hear, the more developed their systems may become. Also, music relaxes and calms the baby. Choosing classical and relaxing tones will make the baby feel happier and fall a sleep easier. For moms-to-be, music can release muscle tension, some pain, bring overall relaxation and harmony. Some women may feel overwhelmed by their pregnancy, but music, massage therapy, yoga or any other type of holistic therapy will bring peace and may ease those tense days.”

Why offer these services?

Peggy Francis adds a perspective that can translate into more menu offerings and an expanding clientele (no pun intended): “Yoga and Pilates designed for pre and post natal women is a real trend, and there is a growing popularity of the spa community experience for women at this most amazing time in their lives. They want to share it with other mothers.”

“I feel it is important now – not just a trend – to include pre/post natal spa services on your spa menu,” adds Luciana LoPresto. “Fifteen years ago, my spa menus included in fine print, ‘please advise us if you are pregnant or nursing,’ which now sounds rather impersonal – as if pregnancy was a medical condition! Occasionally, a mom-to-be would arrive with a bump – as if it was no big deal. I have always trained spa staff in side-lying techniques, as it is a helpful tool regardless. For large, injured or post-op guests, side-lying massage techniques are always handy (pun intended).”

Motherhood is the most archtypal, universal experience a woman can experience, and it is at this time that her self-care should be at its highest level of priority. The spa has come to be a place of sanctuary for women at any crucial time in their lives, and offering this nurturing care to those whose lives are about to become all about nurturing others, is a wonderful gift this industry can offer to a very deserving clientele.