

PART

I

PREGNANCY

Touch is a primordial communication that is before words; it is in fact a language beyond words. The art of skillful touch brings depth to the experience of pregnancy, integrating the changes a woman undergoes while communicating nurturing, safety, and comfort.

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MASSAGE DURING PREGNANCY: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the unique aspects of working with pregnant, laboring, and postpartum women.
- Describe an overview of the worldwide prevalence of touch traditions during pregnancy and birth.
- List and explain the benefits of touch during the child-bearing cycle.
- Describe the multiple levels on which touch during pregnancy affects a woman and her baby's life.
- Discuss the myths and facts about the dangers of touch during pregnancy.

Massage therapists who work with women during their perinatal cycle have an exciting and unique opportunity to share in what is often the most life-changing and important experience of a woman's life—the process of creating, nurturing, and birthing life. Massaging pregnant women can be extraordinarily different from working with other clients. For instance, over the span of 9 months, a massage therapist observes and feels under her or his hands the subtle and dramatic changes that are occurring in a pregnant mother's body: changes in shape, composition, hormonal flow, fat and weight distribution, and posture. The therapist will see the normally nonpregnant client grow into a woman who is carrying 30 pounds or more of extra weight, mostly on the anterior side of her body, and some of it kicking visibly through her growing belly.

Additionally, in the course of her pregnancy, a woman often experiences important changes emotionally, energetically, and spiritually. The massage therapist who sees her regularly may witness the client's fluctuating sense of identity and her ultimate transformation into her new role as mother.

When working with pregnant, laboring, and postpartum women, massage therapists practice specific positioning to guarantee the safety of both the mother and baby. More pillows, supports, and cushioning as well as creativity will be needed to ensure comfort for each individual on your table. The use of sidelying and semi-reclining positions is a necessity, as well as learning to be mobile with your massage when a woman is in labor. Massage therapists who work often with pregnant women develop skills and versatility that will improve their ability to serve and meet the needs of a varied population.

Most amazingly, a massage therapist working with a pregnant woman has an opportunity to affect two people at once, while touching the skin of only one person. Each time a pregnant woman is massaged, the baby in utero, as well as the mother, is affected energetically and physically.

Massage therapists working frequently with pregnant clients also have an indirect and beneficial role in the birth passage of both mother and infant. With encouragement from the massage therapist, the client learns skills for relaxing when touched. When nurturing touch and emotional support is then offered during labor, the woman may find that she can more readily cultivate relaxation in this new

situation,^{1,2} reducing pain³ and her risks of medical interventions and premature birth,^{4,5,6} and increasing her potential for a more satisfying birth experience. Additionally, the sessions of nurturing massage that the therapist has offered the mother during pregnancy or labor will give her first-hand experience in the therapeutic benefits of touch. Because of this, she may find that she naturally increases the frequency and duration of the nurturing touch and massage that she offers to her newborn.^{7,8}

After the birth, the massage therapist might have the opportunity to meet the baby whom she saw moving inside the mother's belly and whom she had actually massaged through the maternal abdomen. Some women may choose to bring their infant with them to a massage session, and so the therapist will find herself or himself continuing to use sidelying position to support the mother who wishes to hold or nurse her infant during the massage. As she or he massages, the therapist will notice that physical adjustments in the postpartum client's body are continuing to occur for months after birth. Massage can assist the new mother's recovery from the musculoskeletal strains and hormonal stresses of pregnancy and birth and can continue to be an important aspect of a new mother's life. When trained in infant massage, the therapist may be asked to share with the parents ways of offering nurturing touch to their new baby.

The massage therapist has a unique role in the life of a childbearing woman who relies on the therapist for help with relief of discomforts and for enhancing the sensory experience of her pregnant body. Pregnancy, birth, and mothering are impressive events in a woman's life, and the memories of the massage therapist who supported her through those phases may remain imprinted in her mind for a lifetime.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you, the massage therapist, to the unique aspects of massage for pregnant women and to lay a theoretical foundation on which later chapters are built. Later chapters will cover the specifics of working with laboring and postpartum women. Covered below are a few traditions of touch for pregnancy that have been a foundation of perinatal care around the world, and some key benefits and issues to consider when offering massage to pregnant women.

TRADITIONS OF TOUCH FOR PREGNANCY

For centuries, midwives, doulas, and families have known well the benefits of supporting women through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum and have



FIGURE 1.1 Ancient Peruvian doll imagery displaying women's hands-on support of the birthing woman.

Used with permission from Aaron Rubinstein.

nurtured them with the healing tools of hands, words, water, and warm herbal oils (Figure 1.1).

Massage accompanies childbirth nearly everywhere in the traditional world (except, of course, where the mother births alone).⁹ According to Navajo tradition, the midwife was known as the "one who holds," referring to how she would often hold the pregnant woman from behind and massage her belly throughout labor while the woman birthed the infant.¹⁰ In Indonesia, the term for "midwife" literally means, "someone who knows how to massage."¹¹

In Guatemala and Belize, the midwife or *comadrona* teaches young women to care for their wombs with herbs and uterine self-massage prior to pregnancy (class notes from Rosita Arvigo's Mayan Abdominal Massage Professional Training, Massachusetts, 2000) then supports them throughout their pregnancy and in labor by massaging their backs, bellies, and legs.

In India and Bangladesh, a woman is often supported throughout her childbearing year with massage and touch from experienced women elders or the traditional midwife or "dai." In labor, according to ancient Ayurvedic prescription, a pregnant woman might be massaged by these elder women, who rub

scented oils into her back, legs, arms, breasts, and belly to assure good baby positioning and a healthy, comfortable birthing. For weeks after birth, the mother and baby both are massaged daily to aide in their recovery from the birth experience.¹²⁻¹⁴

While actual massage practices vary worldwide, touch has commonly been used during the perinatal cycle for similar reasons: as a means to reposition the baby during pregnancy, to ease pregnancy discomforts and labor pain, to assist the progress of labor, to stimulate release of the placenta and prevent post-delivery hemorrhage, to speed postpartum recovery, and to encourage lactation and ease engorgement discomfort.

Furthermore, it is important to note the tradition of respect that surrounds pregnancy and birth in many cultures and to continue that tradition in our approach to clients. As we learn to support women with touch and revive the practice of honoring women for their creative ability, we can remember others worldwide who still actively revere and honor women who have the capability of birthing. This is evidenced by people in Assam, India, where their ancient temple honors the “yoni” or vagina of the Goddess Khamakya (Figure 1.2). Once a year at this temple, the goddess is said to be menstruating and the stream that flows deep inside the temple turns red. People stand in line for days to be able to kneel by this stream and collect the red healing water — the menstrual blood of Khamakya. Men and women from around the country stop work and come to the temple to honor this symbol of her fertility. Women often run out of the temple, moved by their contact with the Great Mother goddess, crying, and calling out, “Ma, Ma, Ma”¹⁶ (J. Thompson, Anthropology Professor, personal communication, 2002).



FIGURE 1.2 Reverence for the Yoni.
A twelfth-century Indian stone sculpture at Sixty-Four Temple. From Mookerjee A. Kali, *the Feminine Force*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1988. Courtesy of Thames and Hudson Ltd.

“Ma, Ma, Ma” . . . it is a universal sound that has called for mother for thousands of years. It is a word that is embedded in our language in the words: *Mama*, *Mammal*, *Mammary*—words related to mothering. It is a sound that often emanates naturally from a newborn’s voice when calling for mother.

The specific word that we know as “mama”—mother—exists in numerous languages: Russian, Mayan, Quechuan, Swahili, Albanian, Hungarian, Indonesian, Swahili, Turkish, Hawaiian, Arizona Hopi, Chickasaw, Chinook, Creek, and Koasati. Many other languages have words related to motherhood that sound similar (Table 1.1).

The cycle of pregnancy, birth, and becoming a mother, and a woman’s role as creator and bearer of life, is revered and acknowledged with elaborate ceremonies by many. Women are respected, feared, and recognized as the source of all creation, or as “vessels of spiritual fire.”¹⁵ In some cultures, simply to touch the pregnant woman brings one closer to what is considered a divine energy. People have recognized that it is no small matter that women bleed on a monthly cycle and do not die, that women bleed in a way that is related to creative energy rather than to wounding, to birthing rather than dying. It is no small matter either to have two people making use of one external body or to have women nourish life with milk produced in her breasts. An Orthodox Jewish woman described that in her tradition, a woman in her menses is revered for reflecting the creative power of the Divine: the power to bring another human being into life. Thus, she is treated deferentially by men, especially during this time in her monthly cycle (Y. Ableman, Chabad House, personal communication, 2002).

Table 1.1 Words for “Mother” Around the World	
Language	Word(s)
Afrikaans	Ma, Moeder
Armenian	Mayrig
Czech	Matka, Matinka
Danish	Mor
Hopi (Arizona)	Maama
Hungarian	Mama
Mayan	Mamah
Old English	Modor
Polish	Matka
Quechuan	Mama
Slovak	Mamika, Mamka
Spanish	Madre
Swahili	Mama
Vietnamese	Me, Me de
Zulu	Uname

Traditional Birth Practices:

Japanese Pregnancy Massage

More than 120 years ago, Dr. George Engelmann described the methods of a Japanese healer caring for pregnant women after their fifth month of pregnancy: the healer “manipulates the abdomen of the patient, who clings about his neck, pressing his shoulders against her breasts, and pressing his knees between hers, so that she is firmly supported. Then he practices a lateral massage with his hands, beginning at the seventh cervical vertebra, and rubbing downward and forward, rubbing also the [buttocks] and hips with the palm of his hands, repeating the movement from sixty to seventy times every morning after the fifth month.”¹⁶

As a massage therapist supporting and touching a woman through the journey of pregnancy, you might remember her as a powerful creator and consider yourself to be the “touch midwife,” not as one who helps deliver babies, but in the Old English meaning of the word as one who is simply “with woman,” holding, massaging, and supporting her with a particular type of nurturance on her birthing journey. In this role as a somatic supporter, you can help women find comfort in and get “in touch” with their physical, emotional, and spiritual selves during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum to help them feel comfortable, safe, and empowered by their choices.

Though touch has long been used as a significant healing tool for women in their childbearing years, its use diminished in industrialized cultures during the intensification of allopathic obstetrical practices and growth of medical technologies. Now it is being revived again and hailed as an important supplemental support during pregnancy and birth at hospitals, birthing centers, and at the home. Recent research, discussed below, has helped to promote touch as a useful and powerful tool for the perinatal cycle by drawing attention to its benefits.

BENEFITS OF TOUCH DURING PREGNANCY

We know that touch has significant effects on our lives; it is critical to our survival and the survival and health of all mammals.¹⁷⁻²³ Touch is a form of communication, a language that has the potential both to support and nourish, as well as to hurt. Children in some

orphanages in the late 1800s had a mortality rate of 100%, attributed in large part to a lack of touch.¹⁷ For a childbearing woman, touch holds increased significance because skin stimulation, such as massage, may support the pituitary’s mobilization of “mothering” hormones that influence breast development, enhance the critical function of the placenta, help the body stay pregnant and prepare for birth and mothering, and stimulate mother-infant nurturing.^{24,25}

Tiffany Field, PhD, a leading researcher at the Touch Research Institute in Miami, has studied the impact of touch in premature infants and, more recently, the effects of touch and doula support for women in labor. These studies have shown that women who are touched compassionately in pregnancy and labor end up touching their children more regularly, effectively, and sensitively.^{7,8} In one of Field’s studies, women were given a 20-minute back massage, five times a week during their pregnancy. These women described less anxiety, had fewer stress hormones in their blood, and experienced increased deep sleep, improved moods, and fewer painful back and leg complaints. Ultimately, the result was a decrease in premature delivery and obstetrical complications.²⁶

Chronic stress, a condition many people experience in developed nations, contributes to numerous health problems, including some conditions that often plague a woman in pregnancy, such as altered regulation of blood sugar levels, decreased immunity, and increased occurrences of hypertension, insomnia, depression, and pain. When a pregnant woman lives with chronic stress, her baby in utero is also affected by the constant flow of stress hormones circulating in the maternal blood stream. X-rays of hands reveal specific markings and lines on the bones of children whose mothers underwent significant emotional stress during their pregnancy.²⁷ Some studies indicate that there may be an increase in attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children who experienced intrauterine stress.²⁸

While it may be difficult to eliminate excessive stress from one’s life, therapeutic massage, especially combined with breathing and visualization, can help to decrease its intensity and reduce the potential for the above conditions. Furthermore, the massage therapist must remember that every massage affects not only the fetus, physiologically and emotionally, but also the mother and how she will later relate to her child. The following list outlines the benefits of massage during pregnancy:

- **Improved Physiological Function:** Massage improves venous blood flow and oxygen perfusion²⁹ while assisting removal of cellular

waste by increasing lymphatic flow.³⁰⁻³² In pregnancy this helps decrease nonpathological edema, reduce blood pressure,^{33,34} and relieve headaches.³⁵⁻³⁷ With this improved circulation, especially through the large vessels of the inguinal region, the occurrence of edema and muscle spasms related to poor circulation can be reduced.

- **Musculoskeletal Pain Reduction:** Massage helps decrease strain on joints and muscles that are impacted by the extra weight gain of pregnancy, reducing muscle tension and back pain.^{38,39}
- **Improved Posture:** Bodywork sessions are an opportunity to teach posture correction, relieving related musculoskeletal complaints such as low back pain, headaches, neck and shoulder pain, foot discomfort, and sciatica.⁴⁰
- **Enhanced Lactation and Increased Prolactin Production:** Nurturing touch stimulates prolactin production, enhancing a mother's "nesting" instincts and abilities to nurture her infant.^{24,25}
- **Improved Emotional Wellbeing:** Studies indicate that massage can decrease stress hormones, reduce depression and anxiety, and increase serotonin production, increasing one's sense of well-being.^{5,26,41,42} All these benefits will also improve outcomes for the baby in-utero.^{28,43}
- **Increased Immunity and Decreased Intra-Uterine Stress:** Touch enhances the immune system function by reducing stress.^{44,45} Reduced maternal stress means a decrease in the possible detrimental effects of intrauterine stress on the baby.^{28,43}
- **Perineal Ease:** Massage of the perineal area, before and during labor can help facilitate stretching of the tissues during birth.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ Due to the intimate nature of this massage and limitation of scope of practice for massage, this massage technique is usually explained to the mother and performed by her partner, midwife, or a trained physical therapist, rather than actually practiced by the massage therapist. However, passing on the information as a massage technique to a client can be helpful, if that is within your scope of practice. By developing familiarity with the stretching sensations in that area, it may be possible to reduce a woman's resistance or fear when the sensations occur during birth, thereby reducing her risk of episiotomy and speeding tissue healing in postpartum. Many women have heard of this technique, and appreciate accurate information about how to do it.
- **Improved Relaxation Skills and Self-Connection:** Massage enhances a woman's

body-awareness by bringing her attention to areas of muscular tension that can relax with bodywork and focused breath. Massage provides an opportunity for a woman to practice this relaxation and breath awareness in preparation for the birth process. Associating touch with relaxation *before* birth facilitates natural relaxation with touch *during* birth.^{1,49}

- **Increased Energy:** Massage can reduce or relieve some of the common complaints of pregnancy including fatigue, stress, and insomnia — concerns that sap a woman's energy.^{26,39,50-52}
- **Increased Ability to Nurture Others:** Massage provides an experience of nurturing, healing touch, which increases a woman's ability to touch her infant similarly. (This is particularly important for women with a history of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.) As the mother experiences nurturing touch in pregnancy, she is reinforced with skills to touch her infant with nurturance; this in turn enables the infant to develop a positive experience of touch and caring and enter the world with more security, unlike infants who are not touched, who become withdrawn and aggressive, with more tendencies toward antisocial behaviors.⁵³⁻⁵⁷

Clearly, the massage therapist can provide an important service during a woman's pregnancy. Still, there are fears and issues that sometimes prevent pregnant women from taking advantage of the benefits of massage therapy. These are discussed below.

ISSUES WITH TOUCH DURING PREGNANCY

Considering the well-documented importance of touch, it ought to be a natural, common element in a woman's experience of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. However, for a variety of social, medical, and legal issues, touch is often limited and restrained instead. Let us look at some of the situations and concerns that may decrease a woman's chances of getting touched during her pregnancy and how the massage therapist might take these issues into consideration.

Body Image

For some women, body image can become a source of concern that prevents them from seeking out massage. A healthy woman will typically gain at least 28 pounds during a normal pregnancy, some of which is naturally deposited in the thighs and buttocks. Without this extra weight, the baby would not thrive,

the mother would not be able to adequately nourish her fetus, and the mother's body would not withstand the stresses of pregnancy. However, some women feel ashamed, unattractive, and nonsexual due to their weight gain and stop visiting their massage therapist at this time to avoid being seen with their added weight. They sometimes will avoid touch from their intimate partners as well.

In other cases, the woman's partner may avoid intimacy due to the changes in the woman's body. Although the woman may revel in her growing size and have a new sense of confidence related to her fertility and creative energy, her partner may become distanced or be subconsciously intimidated by the changes in the woman's body. As a result, their intimacy may diminish and familiar touching may become less frequent between them.

Be aware of the potential for a possible shift in a pregnant woman's relationship with her massage therapist or with her partner as a result of changes in her body. She may have emotional releases during a massage related to the stress in her changing intimate relationship or due to her changing self-image. Take note that in many cultures, a pregnant woman was and still is acknowledged as a Goddess—one who creates and brings forth life, like the great Earth Mother herself. Images of large, strong, and solid women in their fullness and sublime feminine nature have been created by ancient cultures that honored them for this ability. If your client expresses concerns about her body image, you might offer positive reminders that the extra weight in pregnancy indicates health, strength, and the ability to nurture her young as well as reinforcement of the growing "goddess" image.

Fear of Miscarriage

Another major concern of expectant mothers and their partners is the fear that touch—by themselves or others—could lead to a miscarriage. This becomes especially important after a woman feels the baby moving inside her belly for the first time, announcing the reality of its existence. At this time, the mother and possibly her mate may become more excited and simultaneously more overprotective and nervous. The partner may view the mother as fragile and the whole pregnancy unstable and believe that if she is touched the "wrong" way or in the "wrong" place, the mother or fetus could be harmed. If either the woman or partner entertains these fears, they may lose much familiar touch between them simply because of the distance that respect or ignorance can sometimes breed.

Receiving massage from a knowledgeable therapist can help to ease some of these concerns as the

woman feels how confidently she is touched, while being reassured that nurturing massage will in no way be harmful to her pregnancy or baby. As the massage therapist learns appropriate and safe ways to touch pregnant women throughout the childbearing cycle, she or he can educate women and partners about safe and nurturing touch during pregnancy that can help them improve their connection with one another.

Violation of Personal Boundaries

To create the most supportive atmosphere for the pregnant client and to avoid common actions or comments which may be disturbing to her, it is helpful to understand how the client's normal personal boundaries may be inadvertently violated during her pregnancy. Physical changes are rapid in pregnancy, and many women soon feel unfamiliar with their bodies and their bellies, which protrude into the world, bumping into things and sometimes getting in the way. As much as a pregnant woman may feel a stranger to the new sensations and image of her body, strangers themselves may be totally drawn to her in ways she has never experienced before. She finds that people commonly walk up to her, eye her belly with delight, and exclaim, "Oh, how wonderful, how far along are you?!" as they reach out and lay a hand on her bulging abdomen. This can be a frequent occurrence! The mother's belly has suddenly become public property, where strangers practice no restraint and normal boundaries and privacy have diminished. What would be inconceivable to do to a nonpregnant woman, suddenly becomes commonplace in pregnancy, causing some women to feel an aversion to touch, even from a massage therapist or others, apart from her family.

Along with this, many friends and strangers feel the need to relate their own birth stories to pregnant women, often telling stories of difficulty; of dismal, prolonged labors; or of terrible outcomes. A pregnant woman is like a sponge for energetic interchanges; the normal boundaries that may protect us from another person's issues are not as solid during pregnancy. Any negative birth stories that are told to a pregnant woman are likely to sink in immediately to her psyche and have an influence on how she approaches her own coming labor.

Create a sanctuary for the client who may feel overwhelmed in this way by offering a healing space where she can invite nurturing touch rather than ward off that which seems invasive. Avoid your own impulses to reach out and touch her belly immediately as she enters your office, looking much more pregnant than she was 2 weeks or 1 month before! Instead, greet her as an honored guest and client and welcome her into your sanctuary. Avoid offering your own advice and stories about birth, but instead help her to

envision the beautiful, easeful type of labor that she would most like to have.

Body Memories

Many women have been subjected to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and live with the memories and experiences impressed in the cells of their body. For some women, as their body uncontrollably and undeniably changes during pregnancy and birth, emotional responses attached to difficult life experiences may be invoked. Sometimes this may occur during a massage; somato-emotional responses are not uncommon to experience during attentive bodywork. Rising emotions can sometimes overwhelm and take both client and therapist by surprise, and if the therapist is untrained in supporting a client during these types of experiences, the client may feel unsafe to return. Some women may find that when already uncomfortable with their loss of control over their body during pregnancy, massage during their pregnancy may seem too frightening and uncomfortable to consider. The therapist can only offer support and safety to the degree that she or he is experienced, trained, and comfortable; but understanding that difficult emotions are often triggered by pregnancy, labor, and mothering may encourage her or him to get further training in the field of somato-emotional release work.

Education for the Massage Therapists

A lack of knowledge among massage therapists about how to massage during pregnancy can be another issue that pregnant women encounter. Many women have found that *during* pregnancy their regular massage therapist suddenly becomes unwilling to see them, as she or he is uncertain how to address the needs of a pregnant client. Many therapists who have not been trained are concerned about doing something “wrong” or creating a problem for which they would be legally liable. While causing problems is unlikely, this concern is valid and there certainly are contraindications for massage during pregnancy and times when certain types of touch are inappropriate. Bodyworkers should be aware of these issues. (See Chapter 4 for details on precautions and contraindications.) Acquiring the appropriate skills and knowledge to address pregnant clients will ease women’s and therapists concerns.

Education for the Doctors

Massage therapists are not the only ones who need to become better educated about massage during pregnancy. Even though pregnancy massage is becoming

much more commonplace, more education is still needed within the medical system to help touch become fully integrated. Many obstetrical physicians have hesitated when first approached about referring their pregnant clients for massage therapy. Massage can be a wonderful adjunctive tool to help women cope with the common discomforts of pregnancy; it is a loss when women are not told that it is safe and possibly an excellent choice for them to explore during pregnancy. However, these same doctors, after witnessing the results of clients who received massage and were then pain-free and much happier with their growing bodies, have come to accept that massage can indeed have a highly beneficial impact on a woman’s experience of pregnancy. To help expand the use of massage throughout pregnancy, massage therapists may choose to offer in-services and educational packets about the benefits of pregnancy massage to doctors and midwives who may not yet have recognized these benefits.

Education for the Mothers

Finally, the mother’s own lack of knowledge about the safety and benefits of massage during pregnancy can be an obstacle. It is helpful for you to have a span of knowledge about the perinatal cycle to work confidently and reassuringly, especially when working with women who have concerns regarding the safety of massage. By educating yourself about potential risks and contraindications related to specific types of bodywork modalities and understanding appropriate ways of doing massage, positioning, and touching the belly, you will be able to extinguish concerns and educate your client about practices that are safe and worry-free. Many women become voracious readers during pregnancy, researching everything they can get their hands on regarding conception, childbirth, and mothering. They learn that there may be various dangers on the pregnancy path; yet without detailed information, they may begin to grow anxious and uncertain about what is really safe or unsafe for this unborn child. For some, massage might seem too rife with potential for injury. Some women have experienced more than one miscarriage, and massage might, in their mind, seem risky for stimulating another. Many women have heard that certain acupressure points are dangerous or that massage to the ankles is contraindicated during pregnancy. Some may feel more comfortable avoiding massage or will need to know they have found a well-trained, knowledgeable therapist if they decide to see one at all. If you are chosen as her knowledgeable therapist, you will be able to alleviate her fears, rather than compounding your own and hers based on your uncertainty about safe practices.

DISPELLING MYTHS:

The Dangers of Pregnancy Massage

It is not difficult to learn about the dangers of pregnancy massage. Anyone who would like to be convinced of its dangers merely needs to use the topic words—Dangerous pregnancy massage—in an online Internet search engine and then review some of the massage and pregnancy sites that emerge. Some of the dangers reported include the following: massage should be avoided in the first trimester due to the risk of miscarriage from toxic overload after massage; first trimester massage is too much stimulation for the mother; massage to the feet, lower legs, and abdomen could cause miscarriage; abdominal massage should be avoided due to the potential for causing serious problems; abdominal massage should be avoided because babies don't like it and start kicking; massage to the low back is contraindicated during pregnancy, with no reasons given.

A newly pregnant woman or an untrained massage therapist might read this information and believe that it is just too frightening to receive or give massage during pregnancy. However, these bits of advice are not substantiated with research or documented reports of problems. We can examine and dismantle each of these fears.

The first trimester is indeed a time of great changes on many levels; all the more reason for receiving nurturing touch to help a mother integrate the changes that are occurring. There is no research that indicates that massage has caused toxic overload in a pregnant person and thereby caused miscarriage. Therapists are aware that massage can stimulate circulation and help flush metabolic waste into the circulatory system. Acknowledging this effect, many therapists are trained to work less intensely on people who have never had a massage before, encourage clients to drink water after a massage, inform the client that mild soreness for a day after massage could occur, and recommend the client rest briefly before recommencing her day again after a massage. Pregnant women are no different in this regard. Women should

always be encouraged to drink water after a massage. Massage in the first trimester should generally not be exceptionally deep and stimulating if it is the first massage a woman has ever received or if she is experiencing nausea at times. Massage should not be avoided due to nausea, however, as many studies indicate massage can help to *reduce* nausea.⁵⁸⁻⁶⁰ Usually, massage during the first trimester can help decrease anxiety and help a woman relax, have focused time to process the fact that she is pregnant, and offer her a wonderful way to enter into her new pregnancy.

Miscarriage is extremely common during the first trimester, yet it occurs whether women are massaged or not. Massage has never been clearly implicated legally or scientifically as a cause of miscarriage. In the majority of cases, miscarriage occurs because the fetus is nonviable. Touch to the abdomen, unless it is intentionally harmful, does not hurt the baby or the mother. The uterus during the first trimester is low in the pelvis and is not palpable without deep abdominal pressure, which is generally contraindicated for massage therapists during pregnancy. Instead, nurturing touch to the abdomen can be extremely relaxing for the mother, and most women feel that the baby is responding in a positive manner if she or he wakes up and starts moving during a belly rub.

Massage to the legs, feet, and belly during the first trimester *does not* cause miscarriage. There are acupressure points in the lower legs and feet that are contraindicated for acupressure or acupuncture, but general massage to the acupressure points areas will not stimulate them similarly.

With increased education regarding massage during the perinatal cycle, the fears and myths about its dangers can be reduced. Therapists can learn with accuracy when caution or contraindications are truly called for, and help dispel myths and assuage unwarranted fears. Armed with knowledge and gifted with the ability to offer nurturing caring touch, the massage therapist can help more pregnant women reduce anxieties and discomforts, and increase their chances for a pleasurable experience of their pregnancy.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Throughout the world, touch has been used to improve and enhance women's experiences of their pregnancies and births. Ongoing research has helped to support the claims of the many psychological and physiological benefits of massage in general and specifically during the perinatal cycle. The massage therapist, trained in the benefits, contraindications,

concerns, and techniques of perinatal massage, can continue this important tradition of touch. By honoring the natural wisdom of women's bodies, respecting the issues that can develop around pregnancy in our industrialized world, and minimizing fears with education, reassurance and competence, the therapist can provide the optimum individualized care for each pregnant, laboring, and postpartum woman.

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name four elements of bodywork with pregnant clients that are different from working with non-pregnant clients.
2. What are some of the social issues that might prevent a woman from getting massage during pregnancy?
3. Name two reasons how touch has been used in traditional cultures to benefit a pregnant, laboring, and postpartum woman.
4. Discuss ways that you might consider childbearing as a significant rite of passage.
5. Discuss four benefits of touch for a woman during pregnancy.
6. What are the potential impacts of maternal stress on a woman or fetus during pregnancy?
7. What are some of the myths about touch during pregnancy and why are they myths?
8. Discuss concerns, issues, or stereotypical prohibitions to touch during pregnancy and how these can be mediated by a massage therapist. Examine any fears or beliefs you, or those in your community, have had about pregnancy massage.
9. Describe what effects, if any, massage may have with regards to the risks of miscarriage.

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