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Research report

# Infant massage improves mother–infant interaction for mothers with postnatal depression

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### Abstract

*Background:* Postnatal depression can have long term adverse consequences for the mother–infant relationship and the infant’s development. Improving a mother’s depression per se has been found to have little impact on mother–infant interaction. The aims of this study were to determine whether attending regular massage classes could reduce maternal depression and also improve the quality of mother–infant interaction. *Method:* Thirty-four primiparous depressed mothers, median 9 weeks postpartum, identified as being depressed following completion of the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) at 4 weeks postpartum, were randomly allocated either to an infant massage class and a support group (massage group) or to a support group (control group). Each group attended for five weekly sessions. Changes in

maternal depression and motherâ€™ infant interaction were assessed at the beginning and the end of the study by comparing EPDS scores and ratings of videotaped motherâ€™ infant interaction. *Results:* The EPDS scores fell in both groups. Significant improvement of motherâ€™ infant interaction was seen only in the massage group. *Limitation:* The sample size was small and had relatively high dropout. It was not possible to distinguish which aspects of the infant massage class contributed to the benefit. *Conclusion:* This study suggests that learning the practice of infant massage by mothers is an effective treatment for facilitating motherâ€™ infant interaction in mothers with postnatal depression.



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## Keywords

Postnatal depression; Infant massage; Motherâ€™ infant interaction; EPDS

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â€™ Dr. Kumar sadly died last September.

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