

SHIATSU FOR BABIES by Nicola Endicott

Recently, when I gave Shiatsu to a seven week old girl Adriana, her mother Barbara described her as being in a 'cranky' mood, and asked if I could show her something to help Adriana with colic, since she takes around 1 ½ to 2 hours after feeding to come up with her 'burp'.

Colic is associated with: trapped air taken in when feeding, trapped wind resulting from digestion and also with trauma to the nervous system. It is a common complaint in young babies whose digestive system is still immature and unfortunately causes them a lot of discomfort and pain.

Barbara, the mother, is studying Shiatsu so is familiar with meridians and points, so my aim was show her how to use what she already knew about Shiatsu and about her baby. Sometimes, I would demonstrate some Shiatsu on Adriana and then Barbara would repeat the work, other times I would make some suggestions to Barbara and she would explore these. The Shiatsu session with Adriana was a joint exploration, which led us to find out: ways of alleviating her colic symptoms, what position she was comfortable in, what areas of her body she wanted to be held and what Shiatsu points and meridians she responded best to

Adriana responded well to having her belly massaged and her back rubbed, it helped her come up with a few 'burps' and 'farts', which should have relieved some of the discomfort she was experiencing. We also discovered that Adriana was most comfortable in a sitting position and particularly liked being supported with a hand cupped round the back of her head. We worked on her Heart Protector for calming and soothing; she responded well to HC8, relaxing her arms, which we were then able to stretch, to help improve the flow of energy in them. Later we worked on the Stomach meridian in the legs to support her digestive system, she responded by relaxing her legs, which we then gently stretched. Working on her feet and KD1, also had a calming effect on her.

At the end of the session, Adriana was less 'cranky', visibly more relaxed in her whole body and starting to fall asleep.

How to approach giving Shiatsu to a baby

Shiatsu on babies can be given through clothes or directly on the skin with a little oil. Before using any oil, it is better to try out a sample on a small patch on the baby, in case they have any reactions to it. I ask mothers to do this before they come for a Shiatsu session. Some oils that commonly used are almond, sunflower, safflower, grapeseed or olive oil.

For a good response from the baby, it is generally better to let the baby 'lead' the session rather than imposing a sequence of Shiatsu techniques on them. The session can eventually become a joint adventure, the more the Shiatsu giver tunes into the baby and the more the baby starts to relax and enjoy Shiatsu.

At the beginning of the session it's important to find a position in which the baby is comfortable and it is just as important that the Shiatsu giver has a position in which they feel relaxed.

Positioning a baby

In the first few weeks, a good position for the baby can be with the mother or father supporting them against their own body. For example, the baby sitting on the parent's lap with its' back against their abdomen. When a baby is older it may be happy simply lying on their back or on their tummy, on a mat on the floor or on their changing table.

Baby feedback

Once you have found a position your baby is comfortable in then you can start to explore with them what they like and don't. What is great about babies is that they normally are very direct with their non-verbal feedback. Signs of the baby enjoying something can be: feeling them relax the area you are in connecting with, smiling, you feel them settling or calming down emotionally or even blissing out. Signs of a baby not liking something can be them screwing up their face, crying and physically tensing.

The abdomen

For shiatsu practitioners the abdomen is one of the most important areas in the body, working on it maintains good health in all organs and particularly the digestive system; it is also used for diagnostic information.

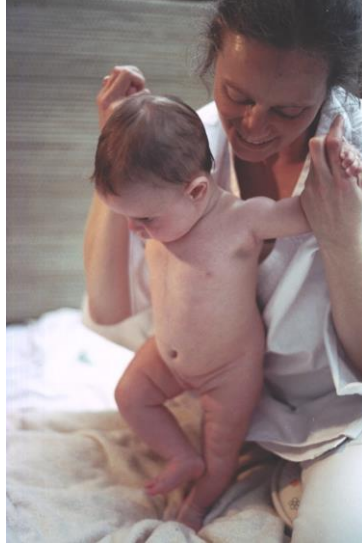
Holding the abdomen with a hand can be enough to calm a baby down. Massaging the abdomen with the palm or the tips of the fingers in clockwise direction can help with constipation and colic. It's best to do the massaging without nappies fastened on, but you may need one underneath just in case, since the effects of the massage can be quite fast. ST 25 can be worked on for constipation or diarrhoea, using a finger or a thumb circling on the point if it is hard, holding the point if it is soft.

Simple holding

Holding an area in the baby can be very helpful to resolve any trauma the baby has experienced at birth. It's important to relax the hand you are holding with and even take a few deep breaths to relax yourself in the position you are, this will help the baby relax too. Some babies like Adriana enjoyed having the back of their head held; other babies enjoy having their back held, their feet, their forehead or the top of the head. Each baby is unique and has it's own special place to be held, most enjoy having their belly held.

Moving and stretching

Watching a baby's movements can give you clues as to how they like to move. You can let them grab your thumb or finger and let them move you, at the end of their movement in a particular direction, you can gently extend their movement further in that direction, if they relax with this, they may let you explore other directions with them. This provides good range of meridian stretches in the arms, which improves the flow of energy in them.



The legs and the digestive system

Working on the legs is generally grounding and can help connect the baby to their physicality.

To help the digestive system, stroke down the ST meridian and up the SP; this can be done a few times until they relax their legs. Then some stretches can be helpful to free the flow of energy. If they are lying on the stomach lifting both their legs up gives a nice Stomach meridian stretch.

The respiratory system

For colds, congestion in the chest or simply to help support the developing respiratory system, work on LU 1 and LU2 in the chest as shown in the picture. Use gentle pressure with circular movement of the thumb on the points.



The back

Most adults relax deeply when their back is worked on and so do babies. Working on the Bladder meridian in the back can be calming for the baby, balances out the back's structure and energy, and is beneficial to the nervous system. Thumbs can be rotated slowly as you go down the back or can slide down either side of the spine several times. It's easier if the baby lies in prone or on their side, but sitting is also possible as shown in the pictures below.



Teething

In the picture Elisa is munching on one of my thumbs (this bit is optional, Elisa's idea!) whilst I'm massaging in circular movements along her gums on the outside of her mouth. GV 26 should be included in this and is generally helpful.



Photos: by Reuben Kay. The baby in the pictures is Eliza Parkinson and I am the practitioner working on her.

References:

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Biography:

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Nicola has been a registered Shiatsu Practitioner since 1994. She trained in Shiatsu for maternity care with Well Mother, and now specialises in Shiatsu for pregnancy, postnatally and babies. She runs private practices in SW London and Surrey.
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