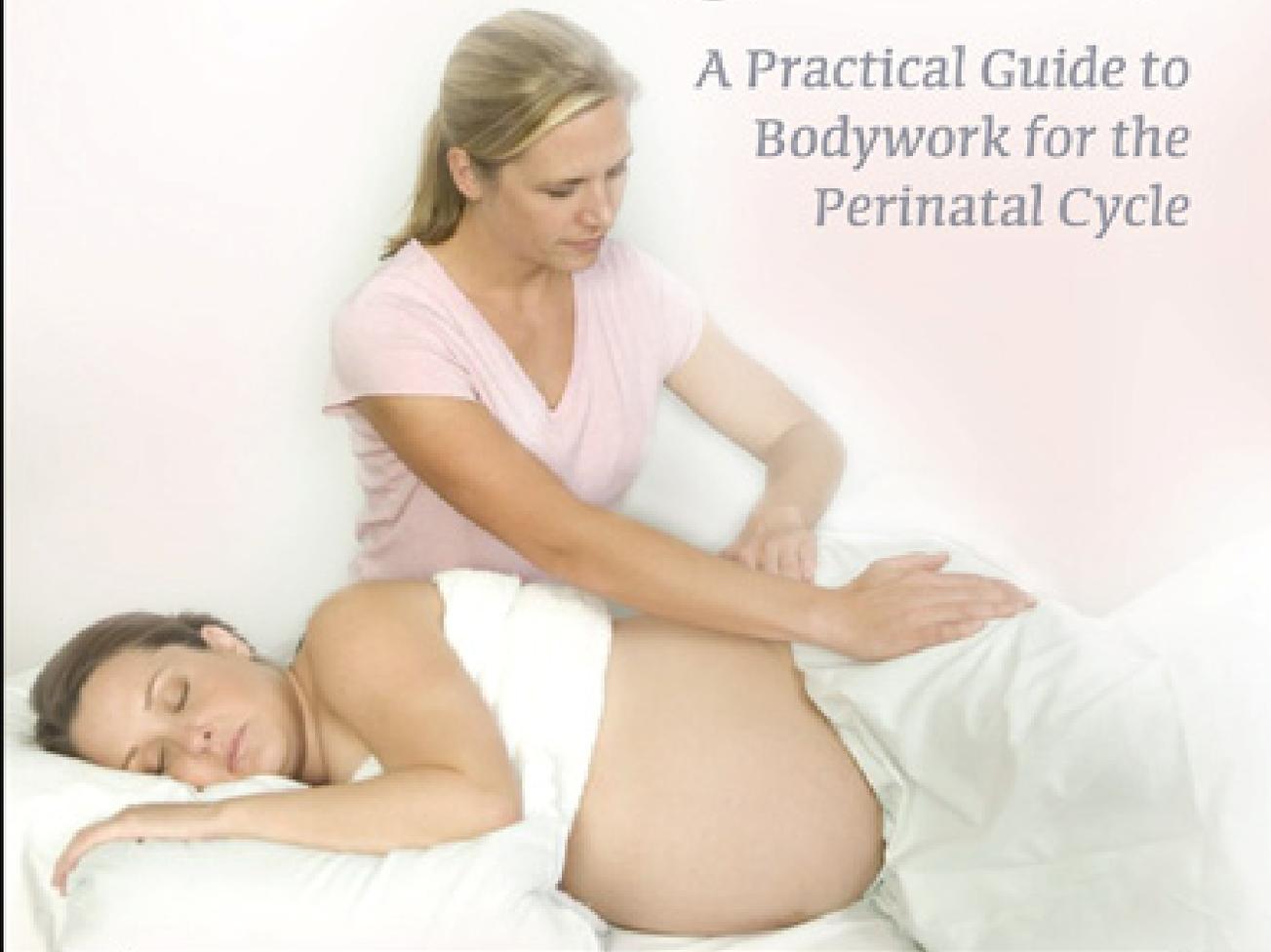


# Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy

*A Practical Guide to  
Bodywork for the  
Perinatal Cycle*



LWW Massage Therapy & Bodywork Educational Series

Leslie Stager



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# NURTURING MASSAGE FOR PREGNANCY:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BODYWORK  
FOR THE PERINATAL CYCLE

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I met Leslie Stager in 1992. We were two lone pregnancy massage therapists in Portland, Oregon, looking to establish a referral network. Over the years our careers developed and grew. Leslie has focused on writing and teaching. I am so happy she has written this book. Now people who can't take her classes can still learn from the master. As a midwife, therapeutic bodyworker, and teacher of perinatal bodywork, I have longed for a comprehensive text-book and reference guide that I could use in my own practice and also recommend to my students. This is the book.

*Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy* is so much more than a guide to massaging pregnant women. It perfectly balances theory and practice. Leslie helps us understand the delicate interplay of physical changes, emotional concerns, and cultural influences experienced by expectant and new mothers. She skillfully weaves case studies, ancient and modern traditions, and self care tips for the mothers and helpful hints for the mothers' partners.

It is amazing to me that, given the growing popularity of massage and specifically pregnancy massage, a book like this hasn't come along sooner. Like Goldilocks tasting the porridge, I have read all the pregnancy massage books that have come before. One book had almost no anatomy and physiology; another had some theory, but little actual massage technique; a third book focused mainly on pregnancy complications and contraindications and was way too scary. This book is just right.

I am excited that Leslie's book is so well researched. It contains everything massage practitioners and

students need to work knowledgeably and safely. It is seasoned with just the right amount of medical information—an inevitable part of most North American women's pregnancies and births. We need facts to educate women and sometimes other healthcare providers about the safety and effectiveness of the work we do. This evidence-based approach is essential because there is so much misinformation circulating about the perceived dangers of massage during the perinatal period.

I am astonished that one of the most common ways for people to find my own website is to type "pregnancy massage dangers" into a search engine. These massage-danger myths prevent some mothers from seeking the healing benefits of massage. Likewise, some massage therapists are afraid to massage pregnant women.

Research shows that women who receive massage during their pregnancies, and especially during labor, are better able to provide loving touch to their infants. Infants need touch—and lots of it—to survive and develop normally, both physically and emotionally.

Through our loving professional touch we can help mothers form an essential bond with their infants. In this way, our work has the potential to change the world. In a time when many people are touch-deprived and disaffected, we massage therapists can help break cycles of alienation and violence with each new life. This fabulous book shows us how. Thank you, Leslie.

Carol Gray, Midwife, LMT



Finally, a comprehensive book on nurturing massage for pregnancy, birth, and postpartum written by an experienced massage therapist/nurse. Leslie's extensive background in both massage and perinatal nursing is evident in each page of this book. The book covers not only massage techniques and their rationale in pregnancy, but Leslie has had the foresight to also cover the important physiological and emotional changes during pregnancy as well as massage for the stages of labor. When massage therapists, nurses, midwives, and doulas are touching a client, they are also touching the mother's emotions and state of mind. Massage helps facilitate healthful pregnancy, birth, and postpartum and provides an avenue of relaxation and touch that is very much needed in our lives.

Pregnancy massage shares many of the goals of regular massage but is tailored specifically to the needs of pregnant women and their changing bodies. Leslie brings her vast knowledge and technical expertise and has expertly covered the whole perinatal massage cycle. The information in this book

serves as an excellent guide to perinatal massage for all who are assisting women in pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. With the high and climbing cesarean rate here in the United States, the section in the book on healing from a cesarean section will be put to good use.

Readers also will find helpful the quick reference list of contraindications (Appendix A). In this very valuable textbook, Leslie has included information for massage students and practitioners, but *Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy* can also be used as an addition to doula trainings, continuing education for perinatal nurses, and an extension to the work of postpartum doulas and lactation consultants.

Paulina G. (Polly) Perez, BSN, FACCE,  
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*Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy: A Practical Guide to Bodywork for the Perinatal Cycle* is a textbook for massage students and certified massage therapists who treat clients who are pregnant or laboring, or who have recently given birth. The book focuses on general soft-tissue and Swedish massage and assumes the reader is already familiar with those techniques as well as the basics of anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology. The book also integrates some myofascial release and trigger point techniques, as well as occasional complementary bodywork methodologies, such as the use of breath and visualizations, acupressure, aromatherapy, and hydrotherapy.

While educating the massage therapist in anatomical, physiological, pathological, and emotional realities of the perinatal cycle, the text integrates information that highlights birthing as a transformative event in a woman's life, thereby preparing the massage therapist for meeting her or his childbearing clients with a holistic understanding of their changing lives. To support this perspective, *Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy* incorporates into the text traditional and indigenous global birth wisdom gleaned from anthropological research and midwifery knowledge.

To address the concerns of many practitioners with regard to working with pregnant clients, contraindications and precautions are examined thoroughly, along with a review of basic obstetrical practices and conditions that a massage therapist might encounter if working with women throughout a pregnancy and birth. The book dispels common myths about the dangers of particular bodywork, such as massage or reflexology to the ankles, and highlights the areas where a practitioner *does* need to use caution, such as in regard to the increased risk for blood clots and varicose veins.

## ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The book is divided into three parts: Pregnancy, Birth, and Postpartum. Each part includes chapters that prepare the massage therapist for meeting client needs, including physiology relevant to that phase of the perinatal cycle and how that physiology affects the bodywork practice. Each part also includes precautions

and contraindications pertinent to that phase, general massage techniques appropriate to that phase, and common conditions or complaints with specific bodywork techniques to address them.

Part I: Pregnancy (Chapters 1–7) begins by describing the ways in which pregnancy massage is unique. It discusses the benefits it can have for both mother and baby and research that supports these benefits. Issues and concerns that prevent women from receiving pregnancy massage are explored along with ways the massage therapist may help to mitigate some of these issues. Part I also introduces images of the global honoring of pregnancy and birth.

The growth of an embryo and fetus after conception is reviewed and the experiences of a pregnant woman during each month or trimester are described, along with bodywork concerns specific to those times. Medical conditions during pregnancy that could necessitate precautions or contraindications in bodywork are explained and a sample medical release form is included, along with clarification of when its use is most highly recommended. Proper positioning and draping for each trimester are described, along with tips to help the therapist address particular issues of a pregnant client, such as appropriate positioning if she complains of heartburn or nausea. Cause, treatment, and specific bodywork techniques for some common complaints the practitioner is likely to encounter are then described in detail, with drawings and photographs to help facilitate understanding of the techniques.

Part II: Birth (Chapters 8–10) describes the basic physiology of labor and birth, a mother's experience through various stages of labor, and tips for addressing her care during each stage of labor. Contraindications and precautions with regard to labor are addressed. One chapter focuses on bodywork techniques to help relieve particular conditions and complications during birth. Readers are reminded in this chapter that their role in birth is to support a woman with touch, not to interfere with the role of family members, a midwife, or a doctor.

Part III: Postpartum (Chapters 11–13) focuses on the areas of the body that may become particularly stressed after many hours of labor, followed by

months of nursing and carrying a growing baby. Common complaints, such as “nursing neck” and engorged breasts, as well as recovery care for the abdomen and womb are addressed with helpful bodywork techniques. Massage for the woman who experienced a cesarean delivery is discussed in the final chapter of this section.

## PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

Features to aid practitioners are integrated throughout the text, along with topics of special interest.

- *Self-Care Tips for the Mother* are practices a client can learn to relieve some of her discomforts. These include stretches and general health activities.
- *Massage Therapist Tips* are highlighted bits of wisdom that can help the massage therapist address or understand certain conditions. For instance, one tip describes how to create a nurturing space for pregnant clients, while another looks at why some clients may have sinus congestion and how to add to their comfort by having a fan available in the massage office.
- *Complementary Modalities* provides information about bodywork modalities which massage therapists may wish to investigate further, when treatments besides massage are especially effective for a particular condition.
- *Traditional Birth Practices* highlights methods of touching used by people of various cultures around the world when caring for pregnant, laboring, and postpartum women.
- *How the Partner Can Help* provides ideas that the massage therapist can teach to partners or birth supporters to give them confidence in offering nurturing touch during pregnancy or labor.
- *Case Studies* help address some concerns a practitioner may have, by sharing stories of therapist encounters with pregnant, laboring, or postpartum clients. Some of these studies describe how a therapist might approach a common condition of pregnancy. Others address a potentially difficult situation, such as a case of a pregnant client’s bag of waters breaking while receiving a massage, and a home-birthing woman finding that touch increased her ability to relax during labor so that her cervix dilated more readily and she avoided going to the hospital.
- *Dispelling Myths* is a feature that dispels common erroneous beliefs about bodywork and pregnancy.

- *Common complaints* during pregnancy and birth are presented alphabetically for the practitioner’s ease of use (Chapters 6 and 10).
- *Contraindications and Precautions* are identified by a special icon throughout the text.
- *Resources for the Practitioner* are provided in Appendix B, which includes contact information of perinatal organizations and prenatal and infant massage organizations.
- *Key terms* are boldfaced in the narrative and are defined in a glossary at the end of the book.
- *Illustrations and photographs* provide useful visuals of how to implement particular bodywork techniques, and offer inspiration about pregnancy and birth.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy* includes additional resources for both instructors and students that are available on the book’s companion website at [thePoint.lww.com/Stager](http://thePoint.lww.com/Stager). This website features the following:

- Answers to the end-of-chapter review questions
- A four-color image bank of all the illustrations and photos that appear in the book
- Video clips, narrated by the author, of techniques and concepts indicated in the book by this icon: 
- Syllabi for 4-, 6-, and 8-hour classes, 1- or 2-weekend classes, and a 3-month class

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Each state has different laws governing the practice of massage therapy. I am unaware of any that prohibit or regulate massage during pregnancy; however, it is the responsibility of practitioners to learn and practice by the laws of their state of licensure. Here are some general reminders when practicing massage for women in the perinatal cycle:

- Breast massage can be very beneficial at various stages of the perinatal cycle, however, breast massage is prohibited in some states. Know your states guidelines.
- In all states it is outside scope of a massage therapist’s practice to recommend medications, orally-ingested herbs, or medical treatments for any client, including pregnant, laboring, or postpartum women.

- While certain behaviors are known to be dangerous for pregnant and breastfeeding women or a fetus, it is outside the massage therapist's scope of practice to instruct a woman to stop these behaviors, such as smoking or drinking alcohol. Your job is to nurture the client with your touch, not with your advice about topics outside of the realm of massage. If you feel a woman's choices may be putting her pregnancy or unborn child at risk, or that your own opinions are affecting your work with a client, you may decide to get a medical release from her care provider or decide it is not in your or her best interest to continue being her massage therapist during this time.
- It is the practitioner's responsibility to be familiar with the contraindications and precautions for working with the variety of conditions that can arise during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum, to know when to refer a client, and when to request the signing of a medical release form.
- There are many bodywork methodologies that are appropriate for various conditions in the perinatal cycle. This book focuses on general soft tissue bodywork, along with some simple hydrotherapies, visualization, breathing, and facilitated stretches. For interest, it mentions the use of acupressure, aromatherapy, and reflexology for some conditions where they are especially helpful or particularly common to use, but expects that the massage therapist will practice these only after receiving specific training.
- During labor and birth, the massage therapist may be in the role of providing comfort care, but unless the therapist is trained as a birth

professional, it is not her or his responsibility to determine or suggest what choices are appropriate with regard to the progress of the labor. You may suggest position changes if your advice is requested by the mother or support team which may promote the benefits of particular touch, or may provide easier access for massage and touch.

## A NOTE TO PRACTITIONERS

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This book shares essential knowledge and practical skills that a massage therapist needs to provide safe, competent, and nurturing bodywork to women during one of the most psychically influential and physiologically challenging times of their lives. The organization of the book according to the three perinatal phases—pregnancy, birth, and postpartum—is intended to help the therapist working with clients during each phase. Observing the appropriate precautions, practitioners can feel confident that their work will never harm a pregnant, laboring, or postpartum client or a woman's in utero child.

There are many beneficial and complementary bodywork methodologies that can be integrated into perinatal work. I encourage students and practitioners to go beyond what is offered in this book and explore many modalities to support their work with pregnancy and birth. It is my hope that *Nurturing Massage for Pregnancy* will help to cultivate knowledge of, skill with, and respect for the perinatal cycle in all who choose to work with clients during this time of their lives.

—Leslie Stager RN, LMT



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My gratitude extends to the Oregon School of Massage for giving me the opportunity to teach multitudes of students over the past 16 years, helping me hone my skills and motivating me to research the topic in depth. And to all my students, for sharing and growing their enthusiasm, asking questions, and spreading the benefits of touch.



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