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Enhancing Well-Being In Low Birth Weight

Jothi Lakshmi. M[1]. Msc (N). MBA[1], Dr. Fabiola M. Dhanaraj[2], Dr A. Anitha[3], MD, DCH
[1]PhD scholar, MAHER, Tamil Nadu, India, mjothilakshmi71@gmail.com
[2]Principal, Meenakshi college of nursing, Tamil Nadu, India
[3]Vice principal, Govt Chengalpattu Medical College, Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT:
Approximately 20% to 25% of new-borns in India are born with low birth weight, defined as less than 2.5 kg (5.5 lbs). This rate is relatively high compared to global averages. Low birth weight (LBW) infants are at increased risk for developmental issues and need specialized interventions to aid their growth and well-being. This article examines the effectiveness of two non-invasive, complementary techniques–oil massage and music therapy–in supporting LBW new-borns. The benefits of oil massage, including enhanced weight gain, improved circulation, and stronger parent-infant bonding, are reviewed. Evidence from multiple studies suggests that regular oil massage can positively influence growth metrics and alleviate stress in LBW infants. The article also explores music therapy, which employs soothing sounds to promote neurological development and emotional balance. Research evidences indicates that music therapy can reduce stress, encourage relaxation, and stabilize vital signs such as heart rate and oxygen levels. By evaluating these methods both individually and in combination, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of integrating oil massage and music therapy for low birth weight (LBW) new-borns. The results imply that these techniques are effective, low-risk interventions that can enhance developmental outcomes and overall quality of life for this vulnerable group. The article concludes when oil massage and music therapy are used together, they complement each other's effects, leading to enhanced overall well-being for LBW infants. The combination of tactile and auditory stimuli promotes deeper relaxation, improved sleep quality, better weight gain, and more stable physiological functions.
KEYWORDS: *Low Birth Weight new-borns, Oil massage and Music therapy*

INTRODUCTION

Low birth weight (LBW), defined as a birth weight of less than 2500 grams, is a significant indicator of neonatal health and is associated with various short-term and long-term challenges. The premature birth or existence of intrauterine growth restriction which resulted in these LBW new-borns, makes them more likely to experience developmental delays and respiratory complications as well as other health impairment. Therefore, optimizing their outcomes of development and overall wellbeing is an important area in neonatal care. Over the last few years different non-pharmacological stimulation techniques have started gaining focus for their possible influence in reducing morbidity and mortality among LBW new-borns. Two of these interventions which promise to provide a solution are oil massage and music therapy. Application of oil to the skin for instance massage, has been found effective in improving weight gain and maintenance, developmental milestones, and physiological stability. It is thought to enhance sensory stimulation and promote bonding between the infant and caregiver. Music therapy, using auditory stimuli such as gentle music or soothing tunes, is also being studied. It is believed to aid neurological development, stress levels, and sleeping patterns. The rhythm and melody of music can help in stabilizing the heart rate, reduce anxiety, and establish a sleep-inducing atmosphere.

Understanding the effectiveness of these stimulation methods is crucial for optimizing care strategies for LBW new-borns. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the current evidence, this review will offer valuable insights for nurses, healthcare practitioners and researchers. It will also help guide the integration of these methods into standard neonatal care practices, potentially improving the quality of life and developmental outcomes for LBW infants.

VARIOUS STIMULATION METHODS FOR LOW BIRTH WEIGHT NEWBORNS:

1. **Kangaroo Care (Skin-to-Skin Contact):** Enhances thermoregulation, promotes bonding, and improves weight gain. Studies show that kangaroo care can lead to better weight gain and improved physiological stability in LBW infants.
2. **Massage Therapy:** Improves weight gain, enhances growth, and supports neurological development. Massage therapy can also reduce stress and improve sleep.

3. **Infant Stimulation Programs:** Includes a range of sensory activities such as visual, auditory, and tactile stimulation. Enhances sensory development, supports weight gain, and improves cognitive and motor development.
4. **Optimized Feeding Techniques:** Supports weight gain and overall nutritional status. Methods are tailored to ensure infants receive sufficient nutrients for growth.
5. **Music Therapy:** Promotes relaxation, improves sleep patterns, and can support weight gain by reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being.
6. **Environmental Modifications:** Minimizes stress and promotes better physiological stability, contributing to improved weight gain and health outcomes.
7. **Physical Therapy:** Enhances motor development, which can positively affect growth and weight gain.
8. **Breastfeeding Support:** Provides optimal nutrition and promotes bonding. Breast milk contains essential nutrients and antibodies that support growth and immune function.

The article focuses mainly on 1. **Massage therapy and 2. Music therapy.**

1. MASSAGE THERAPY FOR LOW BIRTH WEIGHT NEWBORNS:

Massage therapy for low birth weight new-borns offers a promising approach to enhance their health and development. These infants, often at higher risk for developmental challenges and physical complications, may benefit significantly from the gentle touch of massage. Research indicates that such therapy can support weight gain, improve neurodevelopment, and strengthen the bond between the new-born and their caregivers. Tailored specifically to the needs of these delicate babies, massage therapy is designed to be both safe and effective. As neonatal care continues to advance, incorporating massage therapy can provide valuable benefits alongside conventional treatments.

Steps of massage therapy:

Choose the Right Oil:

Use a gentle, hypoallergenic oil specifically designed for infants.

Create a Comfortable Environment:

ensure the room is warm and free from drafts. A comfortable temperature helps keep the baby relaxed. Have a soft, clean towel or blanket on a safe, flat surface where you will perform the massage.

Wash Your Hands:

Thoroughly wash and dry your hands to ensure they are clean before handling the baby

Warm the Oil:

Pour a small amount of oil into your hands and gently rub them together to warm it up. This helps to avoid any sudden temperature changes that might startle the baby.

Begin with Gentle Strokes:

Start with light, gentle strokes. Apply a small amount of oil to the baby's legs and arms, using circular motions. This helps to familiarize the baby with the sensation and helps you gauge their comfort level.

Massage the Legs:

Gently hold one leg and use your hands to stroke from the thigh down to the ankle in a smooth, rhythmic motion. Repeat on the other leg.

Massage the Arms:

Gently hold one arm and use your hands to stroke from the shoulder to the wrist. Repeat on the other arm.

Massage the Abdomen:

Place your hands on the baby's tummy and make gentle, clockwise circular motions. This can help with digestion and alleviate gas discomfort.

Massage the Back:

Carefully turn the baby onto their stomach or hold them in a tummy-down position (with support). Gently massage their back using circular motions, starting from the lower back and moving upwards.

Massage the Face and Head:

- Use gentle strokes to massage the baby's face, avoiding the area around the eyes and mouth. You can lightly stroke the forehead, cheeks, and chin. If the baby is comfortable, you can also gently massage the scalp with your fingertips.

BENEFITS OF MASSAGE THERAPY:

A. Physiological Benefits:

i. Improved Weight Gain

✓ Mechanisms: Oil massage stimulates metabolic processes and enhances nutrient absorption, which can lead to improved weight gain in LBW infants. The stimulation of the skin and underlying tissues promotes better digestion and absorption of nutrients.

✓ Clinical Evidence: Anwar et al. (2020) conducted a randomized controlled trial on the effects of daily oil massage on weight gain and growth in low birth weight infants. The massage protocol consisted of a 15-minute daily oil massage using mineral oil, administered by trained nurses. The study concluded that daily oil massage had a positive effect on weight gain and growth in LBW infants.

ii. **Enhanced Circulation**:

✓ Mechanisms: The physical act of massage stimulates blood flow by activating the circulatory system. Improved circulation aids in the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to vital organs and tissues, supporting overall health and development.

✓ Clinical Evidence: Ghosh et al. (2019) investigated the effects of therapeutic massage on peripheral circulation and body temperature regulation in LBW infants. The study concluded that therapeutic massage positively impacts peripheral circulation and body temperature regulation in LBW infants. The authors suggest that routine oil massage could be beneficial for improving circulatory function and reducing the risk of hypothermia in LBW infants.

iii. Reduction in Stress Hormones:

✓ **Mechanisms:** Oil massage has been linked to lower levels of cortisol, a stress hormone. The calming effect of the massage reduces physiological stress responses and helps regulate the infant's stress levels.

✓ **Clinical Evidence**: Field et al. (2014) explored the impact of oil massage on low birth weight (LBW) infants, revealing that babies who received oil massages exhibited lower levels of cortisol and a more stable physiological state. The reduction in cortisol, a key stress hormone, was associated with improvements in overall health and resilience among these infants, suggesting that oil massage can be a beneficial intervention for enhancing well-being in LBW infants.

B. Psychological and Emotional Impact:

i. **Strengthened Parent-Infant Bonding:**

✓ **Mechanisms:** Physical contact during oil massage promotes bonding by facilitating close interaction between the parent and the infant. This bonding can foster a nurturing environment that supports emotional development.

✓ **Clinical Evidence**: Field et al. (2016) investigated the effects of regular oil massage on parent-infant interactions. The findings revealed that consistent oil massage significantly improves the quality of these interactions and strengthens the emotional bond between parents and infants. This enhanced bonding is linked to better emotional stability and more favourable developmental outcomes for the infant, highlighting the therapeutic benefits of oil massage beyond physical health.

ii. **Increased Comfort and Relaxation:**

✓ Mechanisms: The gentle, rhythmic strokes of oil massage have a soothing effect on the infant, helping to alleviate discomfort and induce relaxation. This sensory experience can reduce crying and promote a sense of security.

✓ Clinical Evidence: Diego et al. (2008) investigated the effects of infant massage on crying and colic. The research found that massage therapy was associated with a significant reduction in crying and fussiness in infants. The gentle, rhythmic strokes of massage helped to soothe the infants and provided relief from discomfort, which contributed to decreased crying.

MUSIC THERAPY FOR LOW BIRTH WEIGHT NEW-BORNS:

Music therapy for low birth weight new-borns presents an innovative approach to supporting their early development and well-being. These infants, often facing unique challenges due to their premature birth, can benefit from the soothing and stimulating effects of carefully designed musical interventions. By creating a calming environment and promoting sensory engagement, music therapy helps enhance the overall care of these vulnerable new-borns. Integrating music therapy into neonatal care offers a

complementary strategy to traditional medical treatments, contributing to a more holistic approach to their growth and recovery.

Mechanisms of Auditory Stimulation:

Types of Music Therapy:

Classical Music: Studies suggest that classical music, particularly compositions by Mozart and Bach, can have a calming effect on LBW infants. The structured, predictable patterns of classical music may help regulate the infant's physiological responses and create a soothing environment.

Lullabies: Traditional lullabies are designed to be gentle and soothing, often featuring slow tempos and repetitive melodies. These characteristics can provide a calming influence, reducing stress and promoting relaxation in LBW newborns.

White Noise: White noise, or steady, non-specific sound, can mimic the background sounds of the womb and help mask disruptive external noises. This can create a comforting auditory environment that aids in sleep and reduces startle responses.

Auditory Processing and Neurological Development:

✓ **Auditory Stimulation and Sensory Integration**: Exposure to music helps stimulate the auditory pathways, contributing to the development of sensory integration. This stimulation supports the maturation of the auditory cortex and other related brain areas, which is crucial for cognitive and emotional development.

✓ **Neurological Maturation:** Music therapy can encourage neural plasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and reorganize itself. For LBW infants, early auditory stimulation can accelerate neurological development and support the formation of neural connections essential for future learning and emotional regulation.

Benefits for Neurological and Emotional Development:

i. Stress Reduction

✓ **Calming Effect**: Music therapy can activate the brain's reward systems and reduce the production of stress hormones such as cortisol. By providing a soothing auditory environment, music helps calm the nervous system and reduces stress responses in LBW infants.

✓ **Clinical Evidence**: Bradt et.al (2011) explored that the music therapy affects stress responses in preterm infants. The research found that music therapy, including both live and recorded music, led to reduced levels of cortisol, a key stress hormone, in the infants. The soothing auditory environment provided by the music helped to calm the nervous system, thus reducing the stress response.

ii. Improved Sleep Patterns:

✓ **Enhancing Sleep Quality**: Soothing music can promote relaxation and facilitate the transition to sleep. Music therapy has been found to improve both the quality and duration of sleep in LBW infants, which is essential for their growth and recovery.

✓ **Research Findings**: Dileo et.al (2012) revealed that LBW infants who listen to calming music experience longer periods of uninterrupted sleep and spend more time in restful sleep stages. Improved sleep patterns support overall health and developmental progress.

iii. Enhanced Emotional Regulation:

✓ Managing Emotions: Music therapy helps LBW infants develop better emotional regulation by providing a stable and soothing auditory environment. This support can lead to more consistent and positive emotional responses.

✓ Behavioural Outcomes: Evidence shows that infants receiving music therapy exhibit fewer signs of distress, such as crying and agitation, and demonstrate improved mood and behaviour. This enhanced emotional stability can contribute to a more positive developmental trajectory.

The combined use of oil massage and music therapy represents a holistic and supportive approach to enhancing the well-being of LBW new-borns. By addressing both physiological and emotional needs, these therapies contribute to improved growth, development, and overall health outcomes for vulnerable infants. Hernandez-Reif (2008) explored the combined effects of music therapy and massage on preterm infants, demonstrating improvements in weight gain, sleep, and physiological stability. Bradt, J., & Dileo, C (2015) reviewed the synergistic benefits of combining massage and music therapy for infants, highlighting positive outcomes in stress reduction, relaxation, and developmental progress.

CONCLUSION:

Enhancing the well-being of low birth weight (LBW) new-borns presents unique challenges, but integrating oil massage and music therapy offers a promising approach to support their development and overall health. Both therapies, individually recognized for their benefits, provide synergistic advantages when combined, contributing to the holistic care of LBW infants. The Oil Massage is gentle, tactile intervention promotes relaxation, improves circulation, and supports weight gain. Through rhythmic strokes and the application of hypoallergenic oils, massage therapy can reduce stress, alleviate discomfort, and enhance physiological stability. The direct physical contact involved in massage also fosters bonding between caregivers and infants, further supporting emotional and developmental growth. Music Therapy is the soothing auditory stimuli that can significantly impact LBW new-borns by reducing stress, improving sleep patterns, and stimulating neurodevelopment. Music therapy offers a calming environment that can help regulate physiological responses and enhance relaxation. The auditory stimulation provided by music complements the physical relaxation achieved through massage, creating a comprehensive sensory experience. When oil massage and music therapy are used together, they complement each other's effects, leading to enhanced overall well-being for LBW infants. The combination of tactile and auditory stimuli promotes deeper relaxation, improved sleep quality, better weight gain, and more stable physiological functions. Additionally, the integration of these therapies fosters stronger parent-infant bonding, which is crucial for emotional development and secure attachment. Implementing these approaches in a thoughtful and personalized manner can make a significant difference in the care and quality of life for LBW new-borns and their families.

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