

Skin-to-Skin Contact



Your touch is how you communicate with your child

How many times have you had someone hold your hand or give you a hug and you automatically had a sense of peace and comfort? The science of touch, which is one of our five senses, is real and has been proven an important part of bonding at birth and beyond.

Skin-to-Skin is a Great Beginning

The first time you lay eyes on your new baby is an experience you will never forget. All those months of preparing and dreaming have finally become real. As the baby is delivered and his airway is accessed, you will see your healthcare provider dry your baby with a towel. The baby should then be placed directly onto your chest. A member of your labor team will cover the baby with a warm blanket. Now, the bonding can begin. This connection of the unwrapped baby lying directly on your skin is called skin-to-skin contact and can provide you and your baby the time to get to know each other. This initial snuggling also has very important health benefits.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a healthy newborn should be placed and stay in direct skin-to-skin contact with his mother immediately after delivery and until the first feeding is accomplished.

Research has shown that your baby's senses will immediately begin to react. He can hear and feel your heartbeat and become familiar with the feel of your skin. Skin-to-skin has proven to help regulate your baby's temperature, blood sugar and heart rate. Studies have also shown that baby's are much more alert and cry less during this snuggling time.

In the past, hospitals would routinely separate mothers and babies after birth. They would be whisked away to be weighed, measured and foot printed. A new family would peer through the nursery window to see a line of cribs and try to identify which baby was theirs!

Now experts agree and understand how important it is for a mother and her baby to be close to one another as early and for as long as possible in the first few weeks and months of life. There are many reasons why skin-to-skin contact is vital for a baby's healthy growth and development. It may also allow you to feel more confident in caring for your new baby.

It is important for you to talk with your healthcare provider about your desire for skin-to-skin contact immediately after delivery. You may also want to include this information in your labor plan if you intend to write one. You should also remind your birth team when you are in labor that you would like skin-to-skin connection, barring any unforeseen complications.



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Skin-to-Skin Encourages Breastfeeding

The best start for breastfeeding is when a baby is kept skin-to-skin with the mother immediately after birth for at least an hour. The baby's sense of smell allows him to find the breast to begin the initial latch-on.

Research has shown that skin-to-skin babies breastfeed better and stay awake during the feeding. In addition, skin-to-skin babies have shown to breastfeed an average of six weeks longer.

Keep in mind, fathers and other family members can bond with the new baby through skin-to-skin contact. This contact can create special bonds with the entire family.



For the premature infant

Skin-to-skin contact, also referred to as Kangaroo Care, can contribute much to the care of the premature baby. Even babies on oxygen can be cared for skin-to-skin. It can help reduce their need for oxygen, and keeps them more stable in other ways as well. It is so beneficial and therapeutic for both you and your baby. You actually get to feel your baby breathe and sense the heartbeat right next to your own. Your baby also gets to know you and may hear your heartbeat as well, which is a very familiar sound to your newborn. The nice thing about Kangaroo Care is that dad or your partner can also hold the baby this way.

To review, skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth has these positive effects on the baby:

- Have more stable and normal skin temperatures
- Have more stable and normal heart rates and blood pressures
- Have higher blood sugars
- Are less likely to cry
- Are more likely to latch on
- Are more likely to latch on well
- Are more likely to breastfeed exclusively longer



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