

Promoting Skin-to-Skin Contact



What is skin-to-skin contact?

Skin-to-skin contact, also called “kangaroo care,” is when your baby is placed on your chest after birth instead of being wrapped in a blanket and placed in a crib or incubator (warmer).



How do I have skin-to-skin contact with my baby?

Your naked baby should be placed directly on your skin without a blanket or clothes between your chest and your baby. This allows your body heat to keep your baby warm. It works best if you place the baby between your breasts on your chest facing you. You can put a warm, dry blanket on top of both of you. This helps keep that heat around both of you. If your room is cold, you may want to put a hat on your baby so there is less heat lost from your baby's head.

Why is skin-to-skin contact important?

Babies can get too cold right after they are born because they are not able to keep their temperature normal. It is comforting for your baby to be close to you. Your baby already knows your scent and touch. Your voice and the rhythm of your breathing are soothing. Skin-to-skin contact is good for both you and your baby.

When should skin-to-skin contact start?

Skin-to-skin contact has the most benefits when you do it right after your baby is born, but it is also good later on. Your partner or a close family member can also have skin-to-skin contact with the baby. This allows them a chance to bond with the baby further.

What are some benefits of skin-to-skin contact?

- Skin-to-skin contact keeps your baby's temperature normal better than being wrapped in blankets or placed under a heating lamp.
- Skin-to-skin contact helps your baby's heart and breathing rate stay regular.
- Skin-to-skin contact shortens the time it takes to deliver your placenta.
- Skin-to-skin contact helps your baby smell and find your nipple so breastfeeding starts easily and is more successful. Your body may also make more breast milk.
- Skin-to-skin contact lowers the levels of stress hormones in your blood, which helps you bond with your baby.

- Skin-to-skin contact can help build your confidence about parenting and your ability to take care of your baby's needs.
- Your baby may spend more time sleeping, longer being quiet and awake, and less time crying.
- Babies who have skin-to-skin contact right after birth are less likely to need to be in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).
- If your baby is sick, skin-to-skin contact can help your baby heal.

What are the risks of skin-to-skin contact?

If you and your baby are healthy right after the birth, there are no health risks from skin-to-skin contact.

When might my baby need to be taken to an incubator?

If your nurse or provider sees that your baby needs additional help breathing or keeping a normal heartbeat in the first minutes after birth, he or she may be taken to an incubator. There, tools like oxygen can be used to help your baby adapt to life outside the uterus (womb).

When can I expect my baby to be taken to an incubator?

In some hospitals, the nurses who are at your birth take your baby to the incubator within the first hour. There they will do a physical exam, give a vitamin K shot, and administer eye drops. The physical exam that is needed in the first hour after the birth can be done while you and your baby share skin-to-skin contact. The eye drops and vitamin K shot can be put off for a couple hours after birth. If you want skin-to-skin contact, you will want to ask your provider what the hospital's usual practice is before you go into labor. This way you can notify the staff ahead of time that you do not want to be separated from your baby in the first hour after birth if you are both healthy.

How do I let my nurse and provider know I want skin-to-skin contact?

Discussing your birth plan with your nurse and provider before labor or when you get to the hospital or birth center is an important step in communication. This helps the staff provide the type of care that is important to you.

For More Information

March of Dimes

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/downloads/CloseToMe.pdf>

Kangaroo Mother Care

<http://www.kangaroomothercare.com>

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