

Skin-to-Skin Information

Early skin-to-skin contact for mothers and their healthy newborn infants



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.

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 may allow you to feel more confident in caring for your new baby.



Skin-to-Skin Information

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 birth 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.

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.

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.



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.

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



Exclusive breastfeeding

Vital to Baby's Health

Exclusive breastfeeding from birth, means giving only breast milk to your baby and no other foods or fluids to offer the greatest benefit of breast milk to you baby, per the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Benefits include:

Infant

- Offers the best immune system protection
- Protects the infant's stomach and digestive tract
- Babies need practice learning to breastfeed, be patient and feed on demand

Mother

- Stimulates a plentiful breast milk supply
- Assists the uterus to return to pre-pregnancy size
- Reduced risks of certain types of cancer

Skin to skin contact with your baby

At Swedish American Hospital skin-to-skin contact is strongly recommended for all babies after delivery for at least 60-90 minutes. Continue skin-to-skin throughout the hospital stay and at home. Dads can also place newborns skin-to-skin.

- Baby is placed on mother's chest, belly-down ,made cozy with warm blankets
- Safest place for baby to recover after delivery
- Better for baby's: temperature, breathing, decreases stress in the baby

Rooming-in together as a family

Rooming- in, means that the baby stays with the parents together during the recovery and hospital stay. Swedish American Hospital encourages 24 hour rooming-in practices.

- Parents learn and respond to their baby's feeding needs
- Babies cry less, breast feed better, decreases risk of jaundice
- Assist parents to bond with their baby, gives practice together before going home

Talk to your physicians, nurse practitioner, midwives and nurses for more information.

Give breast milk alone
(exclusive breastfeeding)
for the first six months.