

Skin-to-skin contact: Information for parents on the importance of skin-to-skin contact

This leaflet gives pregnant women, mothers and their families information on early skin-to-skin contact. It explains why it is so beneficial, and how to do it safely.

What is skin-to-skin contact?

Skin-to-skin contact straight after birth, is where a baby is held close, naked (or in a nappy), usually on their mother's bare chest. **Get yourself comfortable, on your back in a half lying /half sitting position, ensuring that you can see your baby's face and your baby's neck is straight and head tilted upright so breathing is easy.** Your midwife can help you with this, so that you can stay together, ideally uninterrupted, as soon as possible after



your birth, for at least one hour or as long as you both wish, and until baby has had its first feed (WHO 2017). This first 'golden hour' of life is a time for you and your baby to get to know each other. A baby's natural habitat is being close to its mother, and when a baby is taken away from this natural habitat, it shows all the signs of being under great stress (UNICEF, 2011).

Therefore, caring for your baby in this way provides comfort, and can be enjoyed in the first few weeks and months of your baby's life. It makes for a great start to breastfeeding and helps you build a close and loving relationship with your baby, however you choose to feed.

When to start?

Early skin-to-skin contact can start as soon as possible after birth. Your midwife will help you achieve this in a safe and comfortable way for you both.

Key safety points to remember:

- You and your baby need to be dry. Then hold your naked baby close onto your chest, ideally just below or above your breast height in direct skin contact.
- Ensure your baby's neck is straight and head upright and to one side, so baby's nose mouth and airway is free, enabling baby to breathe easily. You can look into your baby's face and eyes, smell your baby's head and get to know each other. Our staff can help you with this.
- Warm towels or blankets will be placed securely over you and your baby, and a hat may be placed onto baby's head in some situations.

- Touch, caress and cuddle your baby snugly, taking care not to clasp too tightly.
- We will ask your partner/supporter to supervise you if you are feeling sleepy, as we don't want your baby to fall onto the floor.
- **Caution:** Extra care maybe needed during suturing, **and allow your partner to hold baby in skin-to-skin contact if using Entonox.**
- **Caution:** Extra vigilance is needed with positioning your baby safely in cases of high BMI
- **Caution:** It may be delayed initially or at any time, if you are feeling extremely drowsy, unwell or are unsupervised by a partner or staff.
- **Caution:** Do not have skin contact if you are using a mobile phone or tablet or any other distracting activity.

Research suggests that this first contact between a mother and baby is extremely important and as long as you and your baby is healthy, other activities such as weighing and dressing can wait (NICE, 2006 HSIB 2020).

What are the benefits?

- Keeps baby warm and calm.
- Stabilises baby's heart rate and breathing.
- Baby is colonised by the same beneficial bacteria as the mother, building up an initial immune system, providing protection against infection.
- Helps promote intuitive feeding behaviour from your baby, (tongue poking and licking, becoming more alert and active) Baby may move toward the breast and self-attach for the first feed, allow your baby time to explore and work things out. If choosing to formula feed then this is the time to feed your baby on these early signals, our staff can guide you with this.
- Promotes the release of mothering hormones (prolactin and oxytocin) which promotes well-being, stimulates calmness, breast milk production and helps release the milk (let down).
- Babies who engage in skin-to-skin contact cry less and for shorter periods, so it is a great way to soothe and calm your baby.
- Babies who latch well breastfeed exclusively for longer.
- Increases feelings of affection in mothers by allowing for that period of bonding.
- Builds your confidence in looking after your baby.
- Decreases breast engorgement (painful buildup of milk).
- Decreases the chance of postnatal depression.
- Your birthing partner may also take part in skin-to-skin contact with your baby, if for any reason you are unable to initially (WHO 2007). This option can be discussed with the midwife on the day and our staff will help facilitate this and you can have skin contact as soon as you wish to and are able.



We will most likely transfer you in skin contact to the postnatal ward where you will be encouraged to continue skin-to-skin as much as possible. We encourage you to have periods of prolonged skin contact once you are home too as this will enhance close and loving relationship building between you and your baby.

Skin-to-skin contact is also actively encouraged with premature babies wherever possible, as this contact can contribute positively to their care and wellbeing (WHO, 2007 and UNICEF, 2011).

References

1. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2017) Intrapartum care, Quality standard [QS105] Quality statement 7: Skin-to-skin contact [Online]. Available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs105/chapter/Qualitystatement-7-Skin-to-skin-contact
2. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2006) Routine postnatal care of women and their babies.
3. United Nations Children's Fund (2011) *Skin-to-skin contact* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/>
4. World Health Organisation (2007) *Early skin-to-skin contact for mothers and their healthy newborn infants* Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/rhl/topics/newborn-health/care-newborn-infant/early-skin-skin-contact-mothers-and-their-healthy-newborn-infants>.
5. HSIB National Learning report: Neonatal collapse alongside skin-to-skin contact www.hsib.org.uk including Unicef UK BFI response

Further information and useful contacts

www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/News-and-Research/Research/Skin-to-skin-contact/

Iffley Ward: 0118 322 7323 Marsh Ward: 0118 322 7319
Or, contact your community midwife or community health visitor.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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