

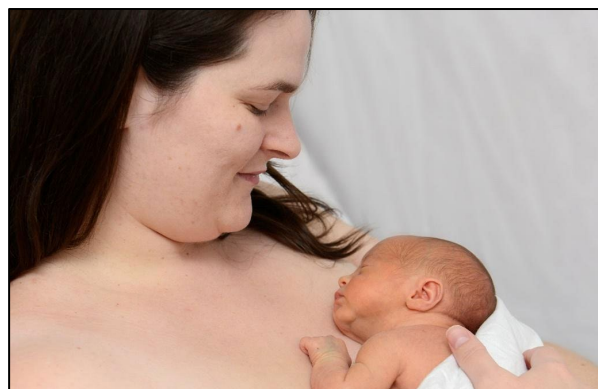
Skin-to-skin contact and why it is important

This leaflet explains the benefits of early and ongoing skin-to-skin contact, and how to do it safely.

What is skin-to-skin contact?

Skin-to-skin contact straight after birth, is when you hold your naked baby (or in a nappy) against your bare chest as shown in the picture opposite. It's a chance to look into your baby's face and eyes, smell your baby's head and get to know each other.

We recommend starting skin-to-skin as soon as you give birth for at least one hour or as long as you want, and ideally until at least baby has had its first feed. This is sometimes called the 'golden hour'. A baby's natural habitat is being close to you, and when a baby is taken away from this natural habitat, it may show signs of stress (UNICEF, 2011). Skin-to-skin will provide your baby with comfort, reducing that stress and can be enjoyed throughout their life but in particular in the early stages. It helps with oxytocin and prolactin production which makes for a great start to breastfeeding, encourages milk let down and helps you build a close and loving relationship with your baby, however you choose to feed.



What are the benefits for you and your baby?

- Keeps your baby warm and calm
- Stabilises baby's heart rate and breathing
- Baby shares the bacteria on your skin and this helps to build up an initial immune system, providing protection against infection.
- Promotes intuitive feeding behaviour from your baby, (tongue poking and licking, becoming more alert and active). Your baby may even move toward the breast and self-attach for the first feed, give 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.
- Continues to be useful in your feeding journey as close skin-to-skin contact readies your baby to feed, encourages let down, which in turn decreases breast engorgement (painful build-up of milk).
- Being so close to your baby releases hormones that can increase feelings of affection and allows time for bonding. Both of these can help with your emotional wellbeing and reduce the likelihood 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.

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 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs105/chapter/quality-statement-7-skin-to-skin-contact>
2. 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/>
3. UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. (27 January 2023) <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/news-and-research/baby-friendly-research/research-supporting-breastfeeding/skin-to-skin-contact/>
4. HSIB National Learning report: Neonatal collapse alongside skin-to-skin contact www.hsib.org.uk including Unicef UK BFI response [Investigation report: Neonatal collapse alongside skin-to-skin contact](#)

Useful contacts and further information

- Iffley Ward: 0118 322 7323
- Marsh Ward: 0118 322 7319
- Contact your community midwife or community health visitor.
- UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/>

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

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

Postnatal Ward MWs & Infant Feeding Lead MW, August 2011

Reviewed: December 2025

Next review due: December 2027

Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'

You can read our maternity strategy here



“Skin to Skin - but watch my chin”

Holding Your Baby Safely

Please make sure my neck is straight and my head is upright so I can breathe easily



Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

“I feel safe”



“I feel warm”



...and that you can always see my face so you can check I'm ok (and I love to be able to see you too)

“I feel loved”

