



Skin to Skin contact with your baby

Giving birth is an active and intimate moment in a person's life; it is the start of a journey and the creation of lasting relationships which form the basis of all others to follow.

Being born into the world is a momentous experience for mothers and infants, and the way this is managed can have lasting consequences for both. This precious moment deserves calm and respect. Also babies are less likely to cry in distress and will show signs of being calm.

Benefits of skin-to-skin contact at birth for mothers and babies

■ Evidence shows that most newborns who are placed in skin-to-skin contact with their mothers immediately after birth move in a stable way from being in the womb, then experiencing labour, to their newborn early moments. This has these beneficial effects upon their survival:

- breathing;
- body temperature;
- blood sugar level.

- Following skin-to-skin contact at birth, mothers show increased maternal bonding and behaviour, and report increased confidence in caring for their newborns.
- Mothers are more likely to establish and maintain breastfeeding and to breastfeed for longer. Infants are protected from experiencing early separation anxiety, and the stress that this brings. Over time, the practice supports brain development and it encourages and maintains attachment.
- As time goes on and the infant develops an independent identity, the secure start they have gained aids this, enabling the infant's increasing self-regulation which affects sleep patterns.

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

Skin-to-skin contact with your baby

- Most infants are born with primitive reflexes and the instinctive drive to breastfeed; this is enhanced by early skin-to-skin contact.

The benefits to infants include:

- provision of comfort;
- building bonding and attachment with parents;
- social development;
- encouraging calm and reducing stress;
- becoming used to maternal skin flora.

Benefits of continuing skin-to-skin contact after the birth

Where skin-to-skin contact is practised for the weeks after birth, the benefits accrue. There are many research studies which demonstrate this and the benefits apply to all babies - to healthy babies born at term, or to those who are premature, as well as being beneficial to babies who are unwell. All types of delivery can lead to skin-to-skin contact post-delivery, even after a caesarean section where the mother has an epidural anaesthetic. The benefits include:

- Enhanced bonding which leads to contented infants who are less likely to cry;
- Easier to establish and maintain breastfeeding; infants who spend time with the mother in skin-to-skin contact just after birth are more likely to breastfeed and to do so for longer; the mother is more able to know when the infant is ready to feed;
- Maintaining the newborn's body temperature and preventing chilling;
- Maintaining and stabilising the newborn infant's heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure and helps to prevent a drop in blood sugar;
- Prevention of allergic responses by allowing the infant's skin to be colonised with bacteria native to their mother.

Birth and after – delivering skin-to-skin contact

- Where possible your newborn should be delivered vertically onto your abdomen, dried and then allowed to move up to your chest. Mother and infant can be covered loosely by a blanket. Skin-to-skin contact should ideally last for at least an hour after delivery and then should be repeated as often as possible during the first few weeks of life.

- Unless your infant is unwell, skin-to-skin contact should be practised, as it reduces stress and promotes bonding.
- You and your baby should be left to manage this natural process unaided and unhurried, unless you request support, or your baby needs additional care.
- Some new mothers may be affected by medication, or may be tired, and so it is very important that you are supported sensitively.
- Touch and scent enables mothers to feel closer to their baby. This promotes bonding and enables a sense of maternal wellbeing.
- Babies who learn to latch on to the breast easily are more effective feeders. This means that they are more satisfied and there is less damage to the nipple, so breastfeeding will continue for longer.
- It is important to let your birth partner, and the professionals attending you at the birth of your baby, know that you would like your baby to have skin-to-skin contact with you immediately after birth. It is a good idea to identify this within a birth plan shared with the team around you.
- If initial skin-to-skin contact isn't possible, for whatever reason, do not despair. Skin-to-skin contact can be established effectively later and this will confer great emotional and physical benefits to you and your baby.

Further Information

Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative: Skin-to-Skin Contact

bit.ly/1pc60H9

The Natural Child Project: Skin-to-Skin

bit.ly/1RPpQRr

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