
Understanding Skin-to-Skin Contact for Newborns

Skin-to-skin contact means placing a newborn on the parent's chest, skin touching skin. This is encouraged right after birth. It's more challenging to do skin-to-skin after a cesarean delivery or for a newborn who needs care in the NICU, but the benefits can be even more important in those cases.

Benefits of skin-to-skin contact

Placing the newborn on the birth parent's chest can help stabilize the newborn's breathing, blood sugar, and body temperature. It also encourages bonding and intimacy and reduces crying and stress in both parent and baby. Skin-to-skin contact can quicken the birth parent's milk let-down so breastfeeding can start sooner. It also helps encourage the growth of many types of bacteria (beneficial microbiome) that normally live in the digestive tract. A microbiome can help the baby better absorb nutrients, help prevent infection, and encourage the baby's immune system. Skin-to-skin contact also helps the birth parent expel the placenta and reduces bleeding. These benefits are important in the hours after labor and delivery and throughout infancy.

How to do skin-to-skin contact

Right after birth

After you give birth, the baby is dried off, ideally right on your chest. You will be helped into a comfortable position, slightly reclined. The naked or diapered baby is gently placed chest-to-chest on your chest. The more skin exposed the better. The baby's mouth and nose should not be covered. Their head should be turned to the side. Cover the baby with a warmed blanket or towel and hat. Make the nipple available to the baby if you choose to. Skin-to-skin can also be done with other caregivers too.

Skin-to-skin beyond newborns

The benefits of skin-to-skin go beyond the birth. You can continue skin-to-skin contact at home throughout infancy. Find a comfortable position and wear a loose shirt, a button-down shirt or no shirt to allow skin-to-skin. The important thing to remember is not to fall asleep with the baby on your chest.

Who may not be able to do skin-to-skin

Skin-to-skin contact is used for a stable parent and baby. If either is unstable or needs urgent medical care, skin-to-skin contact may not be possible or may be delayed.

Skin-to-skin in the NICU

Babies in the NICU can also benefit from skin-to-skin, sometimes called kangaroo care. The benefits of regulating temperature, breathing, and bonding are all equally important, if not more important in the NICU. It can also help a newborn gain weight. A newborn in NICU may be connected to equipment or may not be well enough to hold. But you can still touch the infant. Experts recommend a "hand hug" or "hand swaddling." While the baby is

laying on their back, you place a hand gently on the baby's head and the other on the tummy. The staff in the NICU can help you safely navigate around equipment.

What is rooming in?

Along with skin-to-skin contact, you are encouraged to room with the baby rather than having the baby sleep in the hospital nursery. Newborns may stay in the room with you unless there is a medical reason for separation. You and the baby should be close but in separate beds for sleep. This helps with breastfeeding. It also helps you and your partner start to learn your infant's feeding cues.