
The skin-to-skin trick to soothe your newborn

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If you were about to deliver a baby and your doctor or midwife told you there was a technique you could implement that would help your baby stay calmer, improve your confidence with **breastfeeding**, and make your newborn baby's vital signs more stable, wouldn't you jump at the chance to try it? Well, that technique exists, and it is pretty simple: early and frequent skin-to-skin contact with your baby.

Skin-to-skin is a practice that sounds much like what it is called. It is when a mother and her baby are in direct physical contact, with only a diaper being worn by baby. When performed immediately after birth, the baby should be dried with a blanket and placed directly on mom's chest between her breasts (chest to chest), with baby's head turned to the side and his or her face against the internal surface of one breast. A warm, dry blanket and a hat should be placed on baby to help keep him or her warm. Care should be taken that no blankets cover the baby's face and the chin is not tucked too closely to his or chest to keep the airway open.

When doing skin-to-skin other than immediately after birth, it can be done as described above, or with the aid of a wrap or baby carrier. Whenever you do it, don't feel you need to limit skin-to-skin to a prescribed time. Some babies like to hang out there for an hour or more! If their head starts to bob around in search of the breast, offer it to see if he or she will latch (and this is a great trick for calming fussy babies, or helping to understand your baby's hunger cues in those long first few weeks!).

Skin-to-skin isn't just for moms—it is a task that dads and partners can benefit from as well. In fact, skin-to-skin is a great way to **promote bonding between dad and baby**, especially in those babies who are breastfed where dad isn't as involved in feeding time.

Preterm infants and those infants in the NICU can definitely participate in skin-to-skin care. Even if they have multiple IVs and monitors running or are very small, skin-to-skin can and should be promoted, since they reap so many rewards from this close contact with mom and dad. As long as safe positioning is undertaken and the baby appears stable, skin-to-skin can be done. In fact, many times these fragile infants tend to be more unstable *after* skin-to-skin is stopped, since it helps regulate their vital signs so well.

Reviewed by Dr. Sara Connolly, August 2019

Takeaways

- Skin-to-skin is the practice of holding your baby on your chest in direct physical contact.
- This can be done immediately after birth and any time afterwards.
- Dads and partners can participate in skin-to-skin care, which can help promote bonding.
- Preterm babies and babies in the NICU can also do skin-to-skin, and we know that this contact is actually beneficial for them.