
What is rooming-in, and why should you do it?

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After waiting patiently for your little one to arrive, many moms wonder what will happen after their baby is born: “Where will they sleep in the hospital—in the room with me or in the nursery?” and “How will I get my rest? And does it even matter?” Turns out it does matter, and here’s why.

Years ago, most women gave birth and were put on strict bed rest for days. Their babies went to the newborn nursery and were brought to mom’s room mainly for feedings. The idea was that a new mom needed her rest and having her baby in the room would get in the way of that.

Fast-forward to the present day, and what we see is quite different. We’ve now realized that prolonged bed rest (both in pregnancy and postpartum) really has no benefits and can be harmful and that babies are happiest when they are close to their parents, especially mom. Thus was born the concept of rooming-in: where a baby stays with his or her mom after birth for the majority of the day and night. A small cot is usually kept next to the mom’s bedside, and she is able to get to know and care for her baby around the clock...before having to go home and do it on her own!

If you think this sounds too tiring, the following facts might win you over:

Moms get just as much sleep. Studies have shown that moms who room-in with their babies get just as much sleep as those whose babies spend their nights in the newborn nursery. This is because if her baby needs to feed, she can wake, feed, and go right back to sleep, rather than waiting for a nurse to bring her baby in (and when a postpartum floor is busy, that mom may need to wait quite a while and stay awake longer). Moms also report feeling more secure knowing their baby is right next to them, so they sleep easier.

Parents report feeling more attached and more confident. There is nothing like being with your baby around the clock to promote bonding, and rooming-in provides that. Learning your baby’s cues—while still in the hospital so you can get help before heading home—is also much easier when your baby is right there. You can start to tell which cry is about hunger and which is about a dirty diaper much more quickly than if you miss your baby’s first few nights.

Breastfeeding is easier. With many new parents stressed out about nursing, rooming-in can help in so many ways. We know that when babies room-in, they have higher breastfeeding rates, gain weight better, and are less likely develop jaundice. This is because when moms have the ability to feed on demand (rather than waiting for a nurse to bring them their baby on a schedule), they are able to get breastfeeding off to a better start. In fact,

moms who room-in with their babies have been shown to have their milk come in sooner.

Higher skin-to-skin rates. Skin-to-skin is an amazing practice that makes babies happy, helps promote attachment, and assists with breastfeeding. Parents who room-in do skin-to-skin more often and reap more of those benefits.

Babies cry less. Many new parents think crying is a sign a baby is hungry. That's true, but it's a very late sign. Usually a baby will root around or show sucking motions when he or she is first hungry. In the newborn nursery, hunger often isn't visible until they cry. Baby is then brought to mom, and breastfeeding in those first few days is much harder when a baby is overly hungry and distressed. Rooming-in lets parents see these earlier hunger cues, so their babies cry less overall—and feeding time is much less stressful.

Of course, medical complications may arise with a mother or her baby, so sometimes rooming-in isn't possible. In those situations, exceptions should certainly be made. However, be sure to ask what the practice is at your hospital, so you can be prepared. While most have adopted rooming-in, some lag behind and do not offer this as an option—it's best to know that before you deliver, so you can adjust your delivery plans if you wish.

Reviewed by Dr. Jen Lincoln, December 2018

Takeaways

- Rooming-in is when a baby stays with his or her mom after birth for the majority of the day and night in the hospital.
- Moms who practice rooming-in sleep just as well as those who send their babies to the newborn nursery and possibly better.
- Rooming-in has been associated with better breastfeeding experiences and less crying from babies.