

Skin-to-Skin (Kangaroo Care)

Parent information

Skin-to-skin is when mothers and fathers cuddle their baby in an upright position against their bare chest while the baby is dressed in a nappy. This cuddling method was named "Kangaroo Cuddling" or "Kangaroo Care" because the baby is nursed snuggled 'against the skin', much like a kangaroo does with their young.

What are the benefits of Skin-to-Skin?

- Skin-to-skin promotes bonding.
- Helps mothers with the release of milk producing hormones / milk let down response.
- Comforts the baby - the baby can feel their mother / father breathing and hear their heartbeat. This can be soothing and mimics the movement and sounds of being in the womb.
- Reduces the stress hormone "cortisol" in the mother and baby.
- Settles baby's respirations and heart rate.

When can Skin-to-Skin begin?

- As soon as possible, however, your baby needs to be physically stable before cuddles begin.
- It is also important that you feel well enough to hold your baby.

Can my baby have Skin-to-Skin when they are on breathing support?

Yes! The best thing for your baby is to have skin-to-skin as soon as possible, as often as possible and for as long as possible. However, the timing and frequency of cuddles will depend on your baby's medical condition.

- Initially your baby may be unstable, and he / she will benefit from maximum rest and minimal handling.
- If your baby has an umbilical arterial line (UAC) in place then generally your baby will not be able to have a cuddle, until the UAC has been removed (up to 14 days).
- Cuddles may not be possible straight after baby has had their breathing support removed. For example, when the endotracheal tube (ETT) comes out or when they are starting to trial off continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). Please talk with your nurse about the best time for your baby.
- Babies who have acute respiratory distress (rapid or difficult breathing), particularly straight after birth need minimal handling. It is very important to wait until their breathing has settled before having their first cuddle.
- There are times when skin-to-skin is not possible and if this is the case for your baby, we will talk to you about other ways to comfort your baby until skin-to-skin is possible.



Consumers contributed
to this information.

How long can a Skin-to-Skin cuddle be?

- As long as you like! You should allow yourself **at least one hour** for the cuddle, the longer the better.
- We would like you to have a skin-to-skin cuddle with your baby each day, but it is important that we can also discuss with you when this is not possible for your baby, e.g. if they have become unwell.
- If your baby shows signs of stress during skin-to-skin, such as lowered oxygen saturations, colour changes or heart rate instability, then your baby may need to be placed back into the incubator or cot.
- If possible, it is best that you plan ahead and talk with the nurse looking after your baby to work out what the best time is for you and your baby to have a cuddle that day.

How to get ready for Skin-to-Skin

- Wearing a front opening shirt makes it easier to have a kangaroo cuddle.
- The hospital gown will need to be worn with the opening at the front.
- It is best that you avoid wearing strong smelling perfumes, colognes or oils and avoid cigarette smoke on your clothing on the day you are having a skin-to-skin cuddle.
- Privacy screens are also available.

Any further questions

This fact sheet provides general information.

If you have any questions about your baby's care, we encourage you speak to the nursing and medical staff.