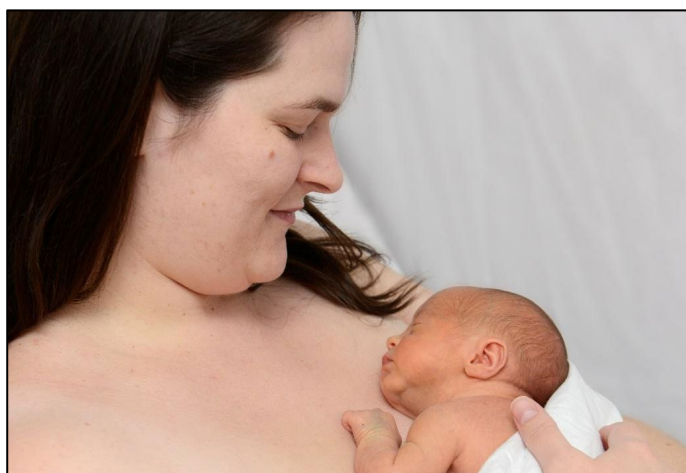


# Skin-to-skin contact and why it is important

**This leaflet explains the benefits of early and ongoing skin-to-skin contact, and how to do it safely.**

## What is skin-to-skin contact?

Skin-to-skin contact straight after birth, is when you hold your naked baby (or in a nappy) against your bare chest as shown in the picture opposite. It's a chance to look into your baby's face and eyes, smell your baby's head and get to know each other.



We recommend starting skin-to-skin as soon as you give birth for at least one hour or as long as you want, and ideally until at least baby has had its first feed (WHO 2017). This

is sometimes called the 'golden hour'. A baby's natural habitat is being close to you, and when a baby is taken away from this natural habitat, it may show signs of stress (UNICEF, 2011). Skin-to-skin will provide your baby with comfort, reducing that stress and can be enjoyed throughout their life but in particular in the early stages. It helps with oxytocin and prolactin production which makes for a great start to breastfeeding, encourages milk let down and helps you build a close and loving relationship with your baby, however you choose to feed.

## When and how should I do skin-to-skin?

Early skin-to-skin contact can start as soon as possible, ideally immediately after birth. Your midwife will help you achieve this in a safe and comfortable way for you both. You can keep your baby in skin-to-skin contact while you are taken to the postnatal ward where you will be encouraged to continue skin-to-skin as much as possible. We encourage you to have periods of prolonged skin contact once you are home too as this will enhance close and loving relationships building between you and your baby.

## Key safety points to remember:

- You and your baby need to be dry. Then hold your naked or nappy wearing baby close onto your chest, ideally just below or above your breast height with direct skin contact.
- Ensure your baby's neck is straight and head upright and to one side, so baby's nose mouth and airway is free, making sure baby can breathe easily.
- Towels or blankets can be placed securely over you and your baby for warmth, and a hat placed on your baby's head if needed.

- You can touch, caress and cuddle your baby snugly, hold your baby securely with both hands taking care not to clasp too tightly. It's best not to hold a phone or device until you are confident handling your baby.
- **Caution:** Extra care is needed if you are sleepy, drowsy, unwell, using Entonox or during repair of your perineum (stitches). While you rest or receive care your birthing partner can provide skin-to-skin.
- Research suggests that this first contact between you and your baby is extremely important and as long as you and your baby is healthy, other activities such as weighing and dressing your baby can wait (NICE, 2006 HSIB 2020).

### What are the benefits for you and your baby?

- Keeps your baby warm and calm
- Stabilises baby's heart rate and breathing
- Baby shares the bacteria on your skin and this helps to build up an initial immune system, providing protection against infection.
- Promotes intuitive feeding behaviour from your baby, (tongue poking and licking, becoming more alert and active). Your baby may even move toward the breast and self-attach for the first feed, give your baby time to explore and work things out. If choosing to formula feed then this is the time to feed your baby on these early signals, our staff can guide you with this.
- Continues to be useful in your feeding journey as close skin-to-skin contact readies your baby to feed, encourages let down and can decrease breast engorgement (painful build-up of milk).
- Being so close to your baby releases hormones that can increase feelings of affection and allows time for bonding. Both of these can help with your emotional wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of postnatal depression.



Your birthing partner may also take part in skin-to-skin contact with your baby, if for any reason you are unable to initially (WHO 2007). This option can be discussed with the midwife on the day and our staff will help facilitate this and you can have skin contact as soon as you wish to and are able.

Skin-to-skin contact is also actively encouraged with premature babies wherever possible, as this contact can contribute positively to their care and wellbeing (WHO, 2007 and UNICEF, 2011).

## References

1. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2017) Intrapartum care, Quality standard [QS105] Quality statement 7: Skin-to-skin contact [Online]. Available at <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs105/chapter/quality-statement-7-skin-to-skin-contact>
2. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2006) Routine postnatal care of women and their babies.
3. United Nations Children's Fund (2011) *Skin-to-skin contact* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/>
4. UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. (27 January 2023) <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/news-and-research/baby-friendly-research/research-supporting-breastfeeding/skin-to-skin-contact/>
5. HSIB National Learning report: Neonatal collapse alongside skin-to-skin contact [www.hsib.org.uk](http://www.hsib.org.uk) including Unicef UK BFI response
6. <https://www.hsib.org.uk/investigations-and-reports/neonatal-collapse-alongside-skin-to-skin-contact/national-learning-report-neonatal-collapse-alongside-skin-to-skin-contact/>

## Further information and useful contacts

Iffley Ward: 0118 322 7323

Marsh Ward: 0118 322 7319

Or, contact your community midwife or community health visitor.

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/>

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Postnatal ward midwives, August 2011

Reviewed: April 2023

Next review due: April 2025

## Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

*'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'*

You can read our maternity strategy here



Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

“Skin to Skin - but watch my chin”

# Holding Your Baby Safely

Please make sure  
my neck is straight  
and my head is  
upright so I can  
breathe easily



Royal Berkshire  
NHS Foundation Trust

“I feel safe”



“I feel  
warm”



...and that you can  
always **see my face**  
so you can check I'm  
ok (and I love to be  
able to see you too)

“I feel  
loved”



Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent