

# Skin-to-Skin... It's not just for the delivery room anymore

Immediate skin-to-skin contact between mother and infant in the delivery room has long been advocated as best practice in hospital settings. Encouraging new mothers to continue spending skin-to-skin time with baby in the weeks and months postpartum has many ongoing health benefits for both mother and baby.

Mother-newborn contact is maximized in skin-to-skin practice (or kangaroo care for premature babies). Placing the infant directly onto the mother's abdomen and chest, skin-to-skin supports the infant's cardiorespiratory and thermal regulation and provides the mother with the optimum opportunity to become attuned to her infant's behaviour and cues. Skin-to-skin care promotes colonization of the infant with maternal microbes, for which the infant has compatible antibodies (Odent 2002)<sup>1</sup>.

Skin-to-skin care has been demonstrated to result in significant increase in breastmilk volume (Hurst et al., 1997)<sup>2</sup>. The most recent Cochrane Review (Moore et al, 2007)<sup>3</sup> found statistically significant positive effects of early skin-to-skin contact on the success of first breastfeeding, breastfeeding status day three postbirth, breastfeeding one to four months postbirth, breastfeeding duration, maternal breast engorgement pain, stated maternal anxiety, as well as maintenance of infant thermoregulation, decreased infant crying, stabilized infant blood glucose levels, and other physiological parameters.

In addition, it found significant differences in summary scores of affectionate love, touch and contact behaviour for skin-to-skin mother-baby dyads.



**"Nothing comes between me and my mom"**  
Skin-to-skin is the healthiest place to begin

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Recent work by Dumas has found that the temperature reciprocity between mother and infant means that mothers do not overheat, infant temperature is within normal limits, cold infants are re-warmed better than in an incubator, the time until placental expulsion is decreased, there is reduced pain reaction in infants and energy is conserved (Marin Gabriel et al 2010)<sup>4</sup> (Dumas, 2011)<sup>5</sup>.

Swaddling or bundling, on the other hand may restrict instinctive infant behaviours such as hand movements, as well as seeking and attaching behaviours. Swaddled infants sleep longer and arouse less (Franco et al, 2005)<sup>6</sup>, decreasing breastfeeding frequency which is particularly significant in the first few hours and days when establishment of successful breastfeeding is important.

Encourage mothers to keep cuddling skin-to-skin as often as possible in the months after birth. The benefits for bonding and breastfeeding continue long after that. If they haven't held their baby skin-to-skin yet, start now! It's not too late.

## References

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