

Skin-to-skin contact after the birth of your baby

Maternity Services

PATIENT INFORMATION

Skin-to-skin contact is recommended for all newborns by the Baby Friendly Health Initiative (WHO and UNICEF) as well as the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG). At Barwon Health, skin to skin contact is valued and supported and is encouraged for all mothers and babies. Where immediate skin-to-skin is not able to be achieved, we will work with you to commence skin-to-skin contact as soon as possible.

WHAT IS SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT?

Skin-to-skin contact is where your baby is dried and laid directly onto your bare chest after birth, covered in a warm blanket and left for at least an hour or until after the first feed.

Skin-to-skin contact is also vital in the Special Care Nursery, where it is often known as 'Kangaroo Care', helping parents to bond with their baby, as well as supporting better physical and developmental outcomes for the baby.

WHY IS SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT IMPORTANT?

Skin-to-skin contact after the birth and at any time following your birth helps yourself and your baby in many ways by:

- Promoting bonding / attachment between you and your baby.
- Calming and relaxing both the mother and baby.
- Regulating the baby's heart rate and breathing.
- Stimulating digestion and an interest in feeding.
- Regulating your baby's temperature.
- Allowing the mother's friendly bacteria to move onto the baby's skin

- Stimulating the release of hormones to support breastfeeding and mothering.
- Increasing breast milk supply.
- Maintaining your baby's blood glucose levels.

Additional benefits of skin to skin for babies in the Special Care Nursery

- Improves the amount of oxygen in the baby's blood.
- Reduces cortisol (stress) levels particularly following painful procedures.
- Encourages pre-feeding behaviour.
- Assists with growth.
- Reduces hospital stay in some cases.
- Improves the volume of milk expressed if the mother expresses following a period of skin-to-skin contact.
- Increases mother's sense of participation in the Special Care Nursery.
- Increased confidence in ability to care for your baby.



WHAT HAPPENS DURING SKIN TO SKIN CONTACT?

When you have skin-to-skin contact with your baby after birth it initiates strong instinctive behaviours. This will include a surge of maternal hormones as you hold your baby.

Your baby's instincts after birth will drive them to have their first breastfeed. If they are enabled to familiarise themselves with your breast and self-attach it is very likely that they will recall how to do this at subsequent feeds, resulting in fewer breastfeeding problems.

We will encourage you to practice skin-to-skin with your baby, particularly when they are interested in feeding.

WHEN IMMEDIATE SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT ISN'T ACHIEVED

Sometimes if you or your baby are in an unstable condition following birth skin-to-skin contact may not be safe to commence or may be interrupted if problems arise. This may occur at births in birth suite or in theatre.

If there is a delay in skin-to-skin contact we will work with you and your baby to ensure you are able to have skin-to-skin contact once you are both stable.

Skin-to-skin contact with the partner or support person is an alternative when the mother's condition is not stable. It may help to stabilise your baby's temperature and breathing.

-Safe positioning for skin-to-skin contact- -Key messages for parents-

Skin-to-skin has many benefits for both the mother and the baby. Correct positioning while holding and feeding your baby helps to keep them safe.

During the early hours of life all babies need close observation by parents and staff for:

- Good positioning that ensures your baby's face is fully visible and airways are open.
- Keeping your baby warm with a blanket that covers their back and beanie on their head.
- Closely observing your baby for easy, regular breathing and a good colour (pink lips).
- Ensuring your baby has good muscle tone and responds to touch.

If your baby's colour changes or they have difficulty breathing, notify your midwife immediately or if you are at home, call 000

