

Early Bonding with Baby

How Skin-to-Skin Contact and Rooming-In Benefits Your New Baby – and You

No one can prepare you for the first time you look into the eyes of your new baby. It's a special experience like no other. In those first few days, you continue the bonding that started during pregnancy. In fact, it's a physiological need, shared by both you and your baby, to be close to each other. Skin-to-Skin contact and Rooming-in are two practices which can enhance this experience.

Skin-to-skin means that your baby is unwrapped and placed tummy-down, directly on your chest, right after he or she is born. A number of research studies have shown the surprising benefits of skin-to-skin and rooming-in. It makes sense – the more time you spend together, the sooner you get to know each other.

Rooming-in is keeping your baby with you as much as possible. Friends and family may encourage you to keep your baby in the nursery at night, so that you can get more sleep. However, the opposite is true. Mothers often sleep better and more peacefully, knowing that their baby is safely in the room with them. You still have care and support from the nursery and hospital staff. In fact, you have the benefit of learning from the experts about your baby's cues and behaviors, as well as his or her care, which can help you to feel more confident after you go home.

THE BENEFITS

Safe, snuggly, skin-to-skin contact engages your baby's senses. Your baby can hear and feel your familiar heartbeat. Those little arms and legs discover the feel of your skin. In addition to providing warmth, the contact helps regulate your baby's temperature, heart rate, breathing and blood sugar. Babies appear more alert and peaceful during skin-to-skin contact. These benefits are apparent even when skin-to-skin occurs for only a few minutes each day. In fact, the longer and more often mothers and babies practice skin-to-skin in the hours and days after the birth, the greater the benefit.

Rooming-in benefits mothers and babies. When babies stay with their mothers, they cry less, fall asleep more quickly and are less likely to develop jaundice. Moms are less anxious and rest better with their babies close by. The benefits of keeping moms and babies together are so impressive that many professional organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization, promote skin-to-skin contact and rooming-in, opposing any routine separation of mothers and babies after birth.

BREASTFEEDING

Your baby's sense of smell is heightened after birth. Placing your baby skin-to-skin helps him or her latch more easily and stay awake during a feeding. Mothers who have more skin-to-skin contact and room-in with their babies usually have a higher breast-milk supply and breastfed for a longer time. Babies gain more weight per day and are more likely to breastfeed exclusively, compared with mothers who have limited contact with their baby or whose baby is in the nursery at night.

BONDING

There are benefits to parents as well. During those first couple days, your baby will quietly get to know you. The time you spend together, whether skin-to-skin or simply rooming-in, gives you a special

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opportunity to begin to bond with your baby. While together, you'll begin to learn what your baby's cues and behaviors mean and how best to care for, soothe and comfort your newborn – allowing you to feel more confident about this new relationship and have a greater sense of control.

And let's not forget about other family members. They also can hold the baby skin-to-skin to help him or her feel calm and cozy. The different feel will provide different stimulation to the baby. Skin-to-skin contact establishes an emotional attachment between family members and newborns.

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