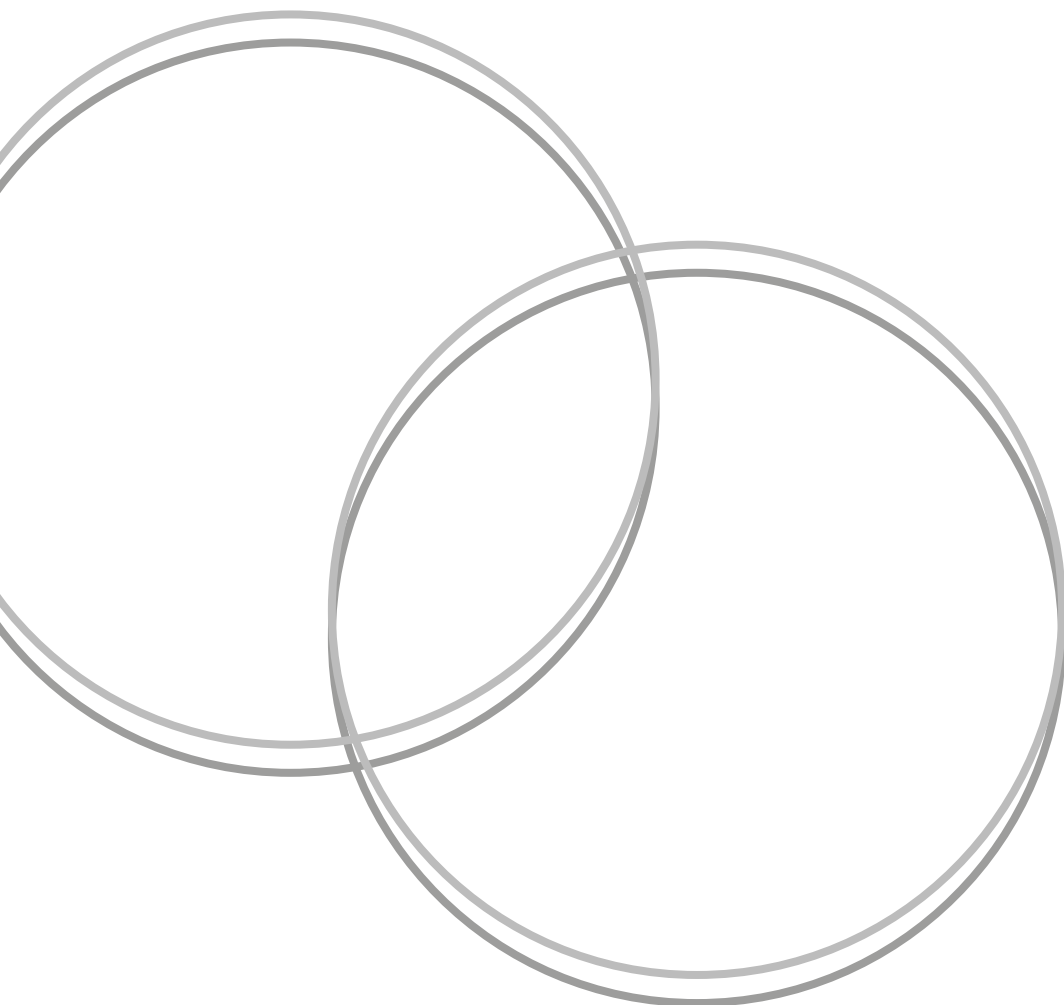


Skin-to-skin contact

**Why it is important,
and how to do it safely**

Information for parents and carers



What is skin-to-skin contact?

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



We recommend starting skin-to-skin contact as soon as possible after you give birth, for at least one hour or as long as you want, and ideally until you have fed your baby for the first time.

This is sometimes called the '**golden hour**'.

A baby's natural habitat is being close to you, and being in this natural habitat may help to reduce stress (UNICEF, 2011).

Skin-to-skin contact is comforting for your baby and causes your body to release hormones called **prolactin** and **oxytocin**. These hormones trigger the 'let down' reflex, releasing milk from your breasts. It can also help you form a close and loving relationship with your baby, however you choose to feed.

Starting skin-to-skin contact

Your midwife will help you achieve skin-to-skin contact 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 we will encourage skin-to-skin contact as much as possible. Do continue this when you are home too, to enhance a close and loving relationship between you and your baby.

Safety points

- You and your baby must be dry.
- Hold your naked or nappy-wearing baby on their front against your chest, ideally just below or above your breast height, with direct skin contact (as shown in the photos in this leaflet).
- Ensure your baby's neck is straight, and their head is upright and to one side; this keeps their mouth and airway clear so they can breathe easily.
- You can put a towel or blanket securely over yourself and your baby's body (but not over their head) for warmth, and a hat on your baby's head if needed.
- You can touch, caress and cuddle your baby, holding your baby securely with both hands, taking care not to grasp too tightly.
- It's best to avoid distractions, such as holding a phone or device, until you are confident handling your baby.
- **Caution:** extra care is needed if you are sleepy, drowsy or feeling unwell. Also, extra care will be needed while using Entonox (gas and air) during repair of the perineum (having stitches) after the birth. If you are feeling sleepy, we recommend dressing and placing your baby in a safe sleeping space such as a cot or Moses basket, to prevent you from falling asleep while holding them.
- While you rest or receive care, your birthing partner can have skin-to-skin contact with the baby.

Research suggests that this first contact between you and your baby, as long as you and your baby are healthy, is more important than activities such as weighing and dressing your baby, which can wait until later.

It is important to note any changes in your baby's skin colour, muscle tone, temperature or breathing patterns, and to notify staff urgently if you are concerned.



Benefits of skin-to-skin contact

Skin-to-skin contact:

- keeps your baby warm and calm
- helps regulate your baby's heart rate and breathing
- enables your baby to share the bacteria on your skin and start building their immune system, which provides protection against infection.

Skin-to-skin contact also promotes intuitive feeding behaviour from your baby, for example tongue poking and licking, and becoming more alert and active. It allows your baby to explore and work things out. Your baby may even move towards your breast and self-attach for the first feed.

If you will be formula feeding, our staff can help you to feed your baby in response to these early signals and behaviours.

Skin-to-skin contact readies your baby to feed and encourages let down of milk, which can help prevent painful, swollen breasts.

Closeness to your baby releases hormones that contribute to feelings of affection, help you bond with your baby, and support your emotional wellbeing, reducing the risk of postnatal depression.

Birth partners

Your birth partner may also like to have skin-to-skin contact with your baby. Please discuss this with your midwife on the day so our staff can support you both with this. Your partner can have skin-to-skin contact as soon as you wish, either after you have had skin-to-skin contact with your baby or immediately after the birth if preferred, or if for any reason you are unable to.

Premature babies and skin to skin contact

We encourage skin-to-skin contact for premature babies whenever possible, as this can contribute positively to their care and wellbeing.

Further Information

NHS England

Skin-to-skin contact with your newborn

nhs.uk/start-for-life/baby/baby-basics/caring-for-your-baby/skin-to-skin-contact-with-your-newborn



Unicef

Skin to skin contact

unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/



World Health Organisation

Skin to skin contact

who.int/westernpacific/newsroom/feature-stories/item/skin-to-skin-contact-helps-newborns-breastfeed



Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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