

6. Keep Your Baby With You—It's Best for You, Your Baby, and Breastfeeding

In the moments right after birth, babies go through an amazing and challenging transition. Inside the womb, they are kept at the perfect temperature and get everything they need through their umbilical cords. After birth, they must keep themselves warm, their lungs must shift to breathing air, and they must learn to suckle, swallow, and digest their mother's milk. Whether or not all these changes will happen safely and easily depends in large part on the care babies and mothers receive right after birth.

Skin-to-Skin Contact

Fortunately, every change required for your baby to safely make the transition to the outside world happens quite easily when one basic need is met; the need to be held in your arms, skin to skin, with no blankets or clothing between you. The familiar sounds, smells, and tastes, and the perfect warmth of your skin help your baby know he is safe and sound.

Skin to skin, your baby more easily transitions to breathing, stays at just the right temperature, and learns instinctively how to nurse. In fact, scientists have discovered that unmedicated babies who are held skin to skin and undisturbed in the hour after birth need no help at all to start nursing. They scoot and crawl up the mother's belly, find the nipple by sight and smell, and latch on all on their own!

The more time spent with skin-to-skin contact in the first days after birth, the stronger the benefits. One amazing benefit is a greater mother-baby attachment. Women who hold their babies skin to skin after birth care for their babies with more confidence and recognize and respond to their babies' needs sooner than mothers who are separated from their babies after birth.

Most babies who are not in their mother's arms after birth are with staff who are routinely evaluating, weighing and measuring them, or wrapping them in blankets. None of these activities is more important for the new baby than having skin-to-skin contact with her mother. In most cases, routine newborn procedures—such as suctioning

baby's nose and mouth, giving routine medications, or taking the baby to the warmer for observation can be delayed, performed while baby is skin to skin, or avoided altogether.



In most cases, your baby gets everything she needs when you hold her skin to skin.

TALK it over

Taking Control of Your Newborn's Care

Find out what your hospital's newborn practices are ahead of time, and tell your care provider and nurse that you plan to keep your baby skin to skin after birth and rooming-in for the rest of your stay. If the hospital policies require many routines in the first hour of birth, consider choosing a different birth setting.



Holding your baby skin to skin naturally supports breastfeeding.

Rooming-in

Many women welcome the idea of getting as much sleep as possible after labor. Once the initial high of giving birth passes, it is common to feel unbelievably tired. It can be tempting to send your baby to the nursery so you can get some sleep.

But research shows that you are likely to get just as much sleep with your baby in your room as you would if your baby were in the nursery. Research also tells us that babies who go to the hospital nursery at night cry more and are more likely to have trouble breastfeeding than babies who room-in with their mothers.



Rooming-in with your baby makes it easier for you to respond to her needs.

RESEARCH insights

Research studies have compared babies who have skin-to-skin contact in the hours after birth with babies placed in a bassinet or wrapped in blankets. The studies found that babies held skin to skin do better in many ways.

Benefits for Babies Held Skin to Skin After Birth:

- They have more stable temperatures
- They cry less
- They have more stable blood sugar
- They breastfeed sooner, longer, and more easily
- They have lower levels of stress hormones
- They are exposed to the normal bacteria on the mother's skin, which may protect them from becoming sick due to harmful germs