

Skin-to-skin contact *for you and your baby*

This leaflet gives you more information about skin-to-skin contact, its importance and positive effects.

The importance of skin-to-skin contact

Skin-to-skin contact is very important for parent-child bonding, especially in the first moments shortly after the birth. It lays the foundation for a healthy emotional, social, mental and motor development of your baby.

Skin-to-skin contact also helps the baby recover from birth. Uninterrupted, in peace and quiet, naked against mother's/father's skin, dried and warmly covered. All babies need skin-to-skin contact.

This first contact is also important for the start-up of breast milk flow and the health of mother and baby.

It may not always be possible straight away...

Skin-to-skin contact should always take place in a quiet place, if circumstances allow this. Also after a caesarean, for example. But if your baby is born prematurely or is ill and has been admitted to the incubator unit, this first contact is not always possible. In this case, you will be separated from your baby. Everything will be different from how you imagined it. It may be the case that the pregnancy did not go full term, the birth was surrounded by anxiety ('how will my baby get on?') and the time after the birth may sometimes be tense.

Intensive skin-to-skin contact will then be postponed in such cases. However, your baby does have a strong need to be very close to you, it ensures feelings of safety and trust.

What is skin-to-skin contact?

For skin-to-skin contact your baby will be placed on your bare chest, wearing only a nappy. This could be with the father or the mother. In order to stay warm you and your baby are warmly covered.

During skin-to-skin contact, try to hold your baby with light but firm pressure rather than using stroking movements. Very gentle touching may irritate your baby. Make sure that your baby's knees are pulled up and hands are near the mouth. The head should be sideways so breathing is not hindered. Your baby will now lie very safely and comfortably and has actually taken up the same position as in the womb.

Skin-to-skin contact: how often, when and how long?

Frequent and lengthy skin-to-skin contact stimulates the natural bonding process. How often and how long you have this contact, depends on your personal circumstances. It is recommended to have skin-to-skin contact for a longer period of time, a minimum of one hour, but preferably longer, for example from feed to feed. As such, you will provide a long period of peace, comfort and safety and above all enjoyment.

In order to disturb your baby as little as possible during sleep, the time to start skin-to-skin contact is preferably around the time you feed or attend to your baby. Next, you can sit down in peace and quiet until the next time you feed or attend to your baby.

Baby in the cot

For babies who are in a cot and wear complicated clothing, it may be too much trouble to undress the baby several times a day to have skin-to-skin contact. It may be better to choose wrap-around vests and jumpers that will open easily from the front, or keep your baby dressed against your bare chest.

Positive effects for you both

Skin-to-skin contact is very relaxing for your baby, but also for you as a parent. Intensive skin-to-skin contact stimulates the bonding process and brings you closer together.

Your baby will want to make contact as well, look at you, respond to your voice and even try to drink from the breast or will just relax and peacefully go to sleep.

Your baby will experience less stress, hear your voice and smell your scent. These are all factors that are very comforting for a baby.

Your baby's temperature will be more stable if you have regular skin-to-skin contact; the heartbeat and breathing will be more stable and the oxygen content as well as blood sugar values will be higher.

Skin-to-skin contact has a significant positive effect on breast milk production and the prevention of allergies and infections. Frequently and lengthy skin-to-skin contact will also improve the growth of your baby's brains.

The longer and more often you have skin-to-skin contact, the greater the positive effect.

Questions and help

Please do not hesitate to ask a nurse to help you. At a later stage, you will no longer need help and you will be able to work out your baby's needs by yourself.

If you have any questions about this leaflet the nurses will be able to provide more information.

Notes on this leaflet

If any information in this leaflet is unclear or incomplete, please notify us. You can share your remarks with us via voorlichting@zha.nl.