

## The Importance of Skin to Skin contact

Skin-to-skin contact between a mother and her baby is beneficial to both at any time – however it is particularly important immediately following birth – irrespective of whether a mother intends to breastfeed or bottle feed her baby.

Your baby, irrespective of whether born vaginally or by caesarean, has a big adjustment to make from the womb to the outside world.

Your chest area varies in temperature – adjusting to your baby’s needs - heating with the hormone oxytocin, and cooling as required. It is wise to dry your baby (which can be accomplished while baby is prone on your chest) and cover with a warm blanket to keep the exposed back warm.

Not only does skin-to-skin contact control baby’s temperature and heart rate but it also exposes him to the bacteria on your skin – for which you have antibodies in your breastmilk.

With your baby in close proximity oxytocin (the ‘love hormone’) is stimulated. This helps in the expulsion of the afterbirth by contracting your womb, and stimulates a letdown of your colostrum for your baby.

The smell, warmth and taste of your chest brings familiarity, security and comfort. All mammalian babies have an inborn drive to feed. Breastfeeding is driven by your baby – who, given time to recover from the birth, will crawl to your breast, search for the nipple and latch – unaided. To interrupt this process may mean disorientation for your baby and may increase the risk of latching difficulties.

Your baby should stay in skin-to-skin contact with you until the first breastfeed, or for at least an hour to encourage breastfeeding to occur. Most babies will latch and suckle during the first hour after birth.

Skin-to-skin contact at any time is beneficial: it will settle an unhappy baby, rouse a sleepy baby and can also stimulate a baby to latch and suckle if breastfeeding has faltered.

The New Zealand Breastfeeding Authority has produced a pamphlet ‘[Skin-to-Skin Information](#)’ – [click here to read \(link\)](#) with related research references and a three minute DVD ‘The First Breastfeed: Nature’s Way.’ [\(Link to resource\)](#)

### **Suggested reading:**

- ‘The Oxytocin Factor. Tapping the hormone of calm, love and healing.’ K U Moberg. Da Capo Press. (2003)
- ‘The Importance of Skin-to-Skin Contact.’ [\[link to the weblink below\]](http://www.nbci.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82:the-importance-of-skin-to-skin-contact-&catid=5:information&Itemid=17)
- ‘Early skin-to-skin contact for mothers and their healthy newborn infants WHO.’ [\[link to the weblink\]](http://apps.who.int/rhl/newborn/gpcom/en/index.html)