

# Early Skin to Skin Contact

*“Can I breastfeed?”... Yes, you can! And here’s how.*



From photo by George Siegle. ©2013Karen Twyman

## **“Hi Mom. I’m home!”**

Those are words you will hear several years from now, but that is also the expression that best states your baby’s desire right after birth: to be next to you! You have been his “home” for the past nine or so months; a place of warmth, feeding and comfort. The best way to bring baby back into this place of comfort and warmth with you is called skin to skin.

## **What is skin to skin?**

Simply put, the baby is placed bare-skinned on your skin, on to your chest. Any of the routine assessments or procedures that are done for newborns are either delayed, or performed while the baby is on mother’s chest. As long as your baby is healthy, he can be placed skin to skin immediately after either a vaginal or Cesarean Section birth.

## **What are the reasons for having skin to skin time?**

- **Happier Baby-** Babies are comforted by being placed skin to skin with their mother right after birth. This is the place they expected to be. They can feel you, hear you, smell you and see you. They are calmer and cry less. Being skin to skin is also pain relieving to the baby, for example, during an injection or heel-stick procedure.
- **Healthier Baby-** When babies are placed skin to skin, they warm up faster and stay warm. Babies’ respirations and heart rate stabilize better, and their blood sugar and oxygen levels are highest when skin to skin. So you see, you are the best “recovery room” for your new baby!
- **Happier Mother-** Being skin to skin helps lower your stress hormones, and makes you feel closer to your baby. This is a very special time for both of you to get to know one another. The bonding that takes place during this early skin to skin time lasts long after birth.
- **Healthier Mother-** The movement of your baby’s body on your body stimulates hormones that cause your uterus to contract, reducing blood loss and stimulating milk production.

- **Better Breastfeeding-** When a baby is placed, undisturbed, on her mother's chest she will instinctively search for the breast so that she can nurse. You will notice her bobbing chin on your chest, her pushing off with her feet and legs. If she wakes up skin to skin, she will know that "food" is somewhere close by. She will be in the mood to breastfeed, and oriented to the task at hand. Those instinctive searching behaviors lead naturally to "rooting" and opening her mouth wide to grasp the nipple and areola, when she sees it. Babies will often latch to the breast, when skin to skin, with little or no help from mom.

Skin to skin is the best way to start breastfeeds in the early days when you are both still learning. Babies given lots of skin to skin time learn to nurse more easily. They gain weight more quickly and breastfeed better and for longer.

- **The benefits continue-** Even after your first skin to skin time, continue to place your baby skin to skin. If your baby is fussy, this will help to make him calm. If he is too sleepy to nurse, this will often stimulate and arouse him to breastfeed.

Skin to skin time continues to help keep your baby warm and comforted. One study found that babies separated from their moms, cried 10 times more often. Lots of skin to skin promotes babies' long-term emotional health and normal brain maturation. You **cannot spoil** your newborn baby by holding him too much. In fact, research has found that babies that are held skin to skin during the first week of life, cry and fuss less when they reach the age of one. Loving parenting begins with skin to skin time.