

# KANGAROO CARE



## Benefits for the baby:

- Increased parent-infant bonding
- Improved comfort from hearing the parent's voice and heart beat
- Fewer serious illnesses/readmissions to the hospital
- Increased ability to keep warm
- Increased deep sleep
- Decreased breathing pauses and apnea
- Increased oxygen levels
- Decreased number of slow heart rate spells

## Benefits for the parents:

- Increased parent-infant bonding
- Increased breastmilk supply
- Enhanced milk let-down for earlier breastfeeding initiation
- Continuous breastfeeding for longer periods of time
- Increased readiness for discharge from hospital
- Increased confidence in ability to care for baby
- Increased ability to cope with the stress and emotions of having a high-risk infant

## *Skin-to-skin contact*

### What is Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo care is a way of nurturing a baby to enhance skin-to-skin contact between the baby and the parent. The baby, wearing only a diaper, is held upright against the parent's bare chest. The term *kangaroo care* is used because the method is similar to how a baby kangaroo is nurtured by its mother - from the safe environment of the womb to the safe environment of the pouch where further maturation of the baby occurs.

Skin-to-skin contact promotes more consistent heart and respiratory rates; it stabilizes oxygen needs; and improves weight gain and helps increase breastmilk supply. This method is especially valuable in caring for premature babies who appear to thrive in this special 'incubator'. Besides the wonderful physical effects, skin-to-skin contact creates a very special bond between infant and parent and offers comfort to fussy or 'colicky' babies.

“Our willingness to banish a newborn infant to a nursery at night and respond to its cries with a bottle of artificial milk is confirmation of our ignorance. Is this the response the newborn infant expects? What are the hormonal consequences? the neural, behavioural repercussions? the nutritional effects? Are they negative? What happens to a new mother's levels of oxytocin and other hormones when she is deprived of the sensory stimuli of touch, smell, sight and cry of her infant?”

To remedy incompatible institutional practices, a different body of knowledge is needed. **Practices must be based on the recognition that a newborn's critical physical and intellectual development and a mother's ability to breastfeed and nurture is shaped by a dynamic interplay of sensory and hormonal stimuli between herself and her newborn infant.** The rhythmic heart beat, the matched sleeping and breathing patterns and easy access to nipple and nourishment cradles the new infant between birth and growing independence.”

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### How to practice Kangaroo Care?

- Mom or dad holds baby against the naked chest in a head-up position.
- Baby is dressed only in a diaper (and a hat if necessary).
- Baby is supported in position by a sling or light blanket.
- Baby breastfeeds on demand.

