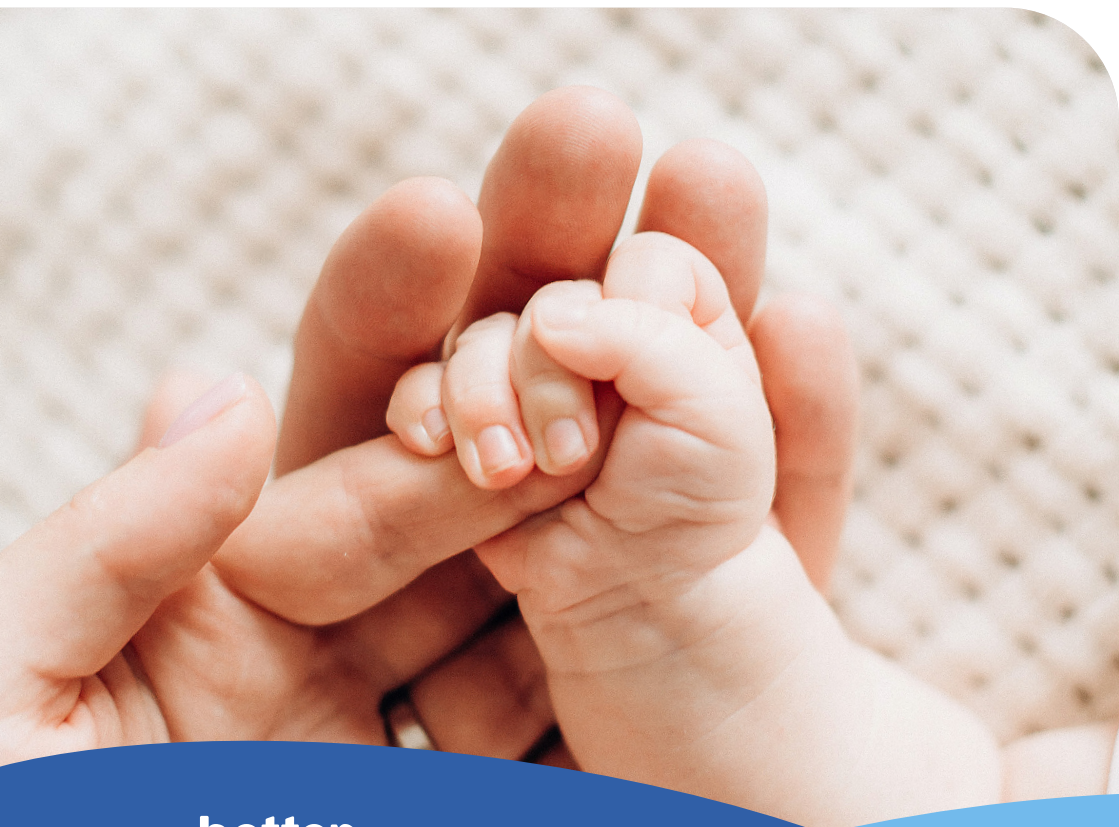


# Meeting your baby for the first time and skin to skin contact



# Skin-to-skin contact is when your baby is dried and laid directly on your bare chest after birth

Skin to skin after birth is the ideal way for you to start to get to know each other. Being close to you will help your baby to adjust gently to life outside the womb and support you both to begin a close, loving relationship. This reduces stress and benefits a baby's brain development.

If you and baby are both well we will encourage you to have skin to skin contact for at least the first hour after birth, or for as long as you want to, and for you to give the first feed during this time. All babies will benefit from this experience, whether they are breast or bottle fed. Skin to skin contact can continue to benefit you and your baby throughout the first year and beyond.

## Say hello to your baby, here's how...

**B** Blankets on to keep baby warm, hat on for the first two hours.

**A** Ask for assistance if you need it.

**B** Baby will let you know when it's time for a feed.

**Y** You should be awake and able to see your baby's face clearly, not lying flat and you should be close enough to kiss.

## Benefits of skin to skin for mothers and babies

### Skin to skin is very important in:

- Calming and relaxing both mother and baby.
- Regulating baby's heart rate and breathing, helping them to adapt gently to life outside the womb.
- Stimulating digestion and an interest in feeding.
- Regulating temperature so your baby stays warm.
- Providing protection from infection with friendly bacteria they pick up from your skin.
- Developing your relationship and increasing your confidence in caring for your baby.
- Encouraging the release of the hormones involved in breastfeeding.
- Helping to develop their natural feeding behaviours, whether breast or bottle feeding.

## Benefits for partners and other family members

- Skin to skin is good for partners and other family members and baby too – calming them both, helping with bonding and giving them a really good way of comforting and soothing baby whilst you rest.
- If you are unable to hold baby straight after birth, skin to skin with a partner provides a good alternative for keeping baby warm and comforted.
- It is very important that anyone who has skin to skin is aware of how to keep your baby safe – read more about safety in skin to skin below.

For more information about the value of skin to skin go to the Unicef's Baby Friendly Initiative Website: Skin-to-skin contact - Baby Friendly Initiative ([unicef.org.uk](http://unicef.org.uk))

## Safety considerations

**The safety of your baby is important at all times. Here are some points to be aware of when holding your baby in skin to skin:**

- There is lots of evidence that skin to skin benefits both mothers and babies. If you are both well we will encourage you to have skin to skin - we will observe you closely and perform some checks in the first few minutes after birth.
- Most checks by your midwife can be carried out during skin to skin contact, but in some cases this may need to be interrupted for a short time.
- During skin to skin, your midwife will continue checks of both mother and baby, and will let you know if either of you need any additional care.
- It is important that your baby is kept warm after birth – we advise that they wear a hat for the first few hours and are covered over the top with blankets.
- A good position for you to hold and feed your baby in skin to skin is 'semi-recumbent', or 'half lying, half sitting' so you can always see your baby's face.
- Your midwife will show you how to position your baby on their front with their head turned to the side and chin away from the chest so that their nose and mouth are always clear from obstructions.
- Your midwife will talk to you about watching for changes in your baby's condition – if you are concerned tell them immediately so that they can respond straight away.
- There are other circumstances which may increase risks during skin to skin. These will be discussed with you individually, but may include a high Body Mass Index (BMI), or excessive drowsiness.

- It is important to note any changes in your baby's skin colour, muscle tone, temperature or breathing patterns and to urgently notify staff if you are concerned.
- It is a good idea to avoid distractions such as phones during this special time, and for you and your partner to focus purely on your baby.
- Consider safety each time you have your baby in skin to skin, including when you are at home.

If you are sleepy, and no-one can watch you and baby in skin contact, please ask for assistance and place your baby in the cot whilst you wait.







## Skin to skin after caesarean section

Having a caesarean section or an instrumental birth in theatre should not interfere with skin to skin contact provided you and your baby are well.

If you are having a planned caesarean birth you can talk beforehand to the midwife who will be with you and ensure that she is aware of your wishes. Having one arm outside of the theatre gown, or wearing your gown so it opens at the front can make skin to skin easier.

Your midwife may dry your baby and put on a nappy and name bands first before you to begin skin to skin – this will prevent the need for interruptions later.

If you have had a caesarean section it will not be possible for you to be in half-lying, half-sitting position whilst you are in the operating theatre. You are more likely to be lying flat until your surgery is finished, although it may be possible to raise your head with a pillow if this is comfortable for you.

Your baby will be placed in a position where they can breathe easily and their nostrils are not covered.

Your baby will need to be observed constantly by someone else as you may not be able to do this easily yourself. The midwife will explain to you and your partner how to recognise good colour and easy, regular breathing in your baby. If you feel nauseous or unwell at any time alert a member of staff so that your baby can be removed if necessary. Your partner can have skin to skin until you feel well enough.

Skin to skin will need to be briefly interrupted whilst you are moved from the operating table to a bed, but can be continued immediately afterwards and continue in the recovery area and postnatal ward. You will have drips and monitoring equipment attached to your hands or arms in the hours following your surgery, but your midwife can help you to hold your baby in a comfortable and safe position.



## Skin to skin beyond the first hours

We will encourage you to continue with skin to skin beyond the first hours after birth, whether you are on the ward or at home. It is a good way to continue to build a strong relationship with your baby, and to encourage feeding and milk supply if you are breastfeeding.



## It is important to continue to ensure that your baby is safe at all times

- If you are holding your baby in skin to skin you will not have constant supervision from staff. It is important that you are aware of your surroundings and of baby's position at all times to avoid your baby falling to the floor, or becoming trapped by your body or by bedding.
- If you are unable to move around normally (for example after an epidural or caesarean section) take care to ensure that any pillows around you are not placed where there is a danger of your baby's face being covered.
- If a partner is present ensure that you have shared these safety messages and that they are able to watch you and your baby should you become sleepy. Ensure that they tell a member of staff if leaving you alone with your baby in skin to skin.
- Once you are home with your baby it is important that both you and your partner remain aware of all safety considerations.

- Scan the QR code for further information, fact sheets and videos on skin to skin and safer sleep for babies.



**If you would like any more information about skin to skin with your baby after birth, please speak to your midwife.**



For more information contact your Community Midwife on **01204 390023**, the Infant Feeding Team on **01204 390423** or email **[infantfeeding@boltonft.nhs.uk](mailto:infantfeeding@boltonft.nhs.uk)**

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If you require a copy of this leaflet in any other language or format, such as large print or audio, please contact **01204 390193**