



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



Kangaroo Care for Your Premature or Sick Baby

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If your baby is born early or is sick, he or she may start life in the neonatal intensive care unit of your hospital. If this happens, you may wonder if you will be able to breastfeed. Kangaroo care helps you to be successful breastfeeding your premature or sick baby.

What is kangaroo care?

Kangaroo care, also called skin-to-skin care, is when you hold your baby naked or in just a diaper on your bare chest. Holding your baby this way will allow him or her to get to know you, through your scent, your touch, your voice, and the feel of your skin.

Who can kangaroo?

- Moms and dads can both provide kangaroo care.
- You can kangaroo your baby whether he or she is big or little, sick or healthy.
- The nurses will help you decide when it is time to hold your baby this way.
- Your baby may appear very fragile, and this might make you feel nervous to hold him or her. Remember, there is nothing more natural than you holding your baby, especially if he or she is sick. Together with your baby's nurse, you will be able to make the right decision about holding your baby.
- If you and your baby's nurses decide that it is safe to hold your baby, then the safest way to hold him or her is in kangaroo care.

Why is it important to kangaroo?

Kangaroo care will help you to:

- Make more milk.
- Feel even more love for your baby.

- Feel closer to your partner.
- Cope with "the baby blues."
- Learn how to respond to your baby's needs.
- Have more confidence in your mothering skills.
- Be ready for breastfeeding.

Kangaroo care will help your baby to:

- Sleep better.
- Cry less.
- Keep his or her body the right temperature.
- Move into an open crib sooner.
- Breathe better.
- Gain weight.
- Feel less pain.
- Know you better.
- Be ready for breastfeeding.

When you kangaroo your baby, your body makes milk to protect your baby

- Your body is able to recognize germs that are on or around your baby.
- Your body then starts making cells to fight those germs.
- Those germ-fighting cells move into your breast milk.
- When your baby gets your breast milk, it helps him or her fight those germs.
- The more often you kangaroo your baby, the easier it is for your body to perform this process.

How do you kangaroo?

When it is time to hold your baby, ask your baby's nurse to help you hold him or her skin-to-skin instead of wrapped in a blanket.



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- Plan to be with your baby for at least an hour (it is best to kangaroo your baby for at least 60-90 minutes, 1 whole sleep cycle). It is best if this is around your baby's feeding or "hands-on" time.
- Use the bathroom and get a drink before you begin kangaroo care.
- Wear a button-down or zip-up top. If you do not have one on, ask your nurse for a gown to change into. If kangaroo care is something you enjoy, you can keep a special shirt at your baby's bedside to change into when you visit.
- Remove your bra so that your baby is exposed to as much skin as possible.
- Sit in a chair that reclines. Your baby will enjoy kangaroo care the most if you recline in your chair.
- Before you begin kangaroo care, talk with your nurse about how you will get your baby to your chest (you can either lift him or her to your chest yourself or your baby's nurse can lay him or her on your chest).
- The stressful part of kangaroo care for your baby is when he or she is moving from the hospital bed to your chest. Once the baby is on your chest, he or she will be even more relaxed and safe than when he or she is in the bed.

- Sit back and enjoy this special time with your baby!

Kangaroo your baby as often as possible. It is good for your baby, good for you, and good for making lots of milk.

Kangaroo Care:

- **Skin-to-skin contact for part of the day**
- **Supports medical care for sick or premature baby**

Kangaroo Mother Care:

- **Skin-to-skin contact for most of the time day and night**
- **A complete approach to support the sick or premature baby**