

Kangaroo Care



Kangaroo care is a form of holding in which a baby is placed on the chest of a parent or other adult in direct skin-to-skin contact.

Who can kangaroo?

Both moms and dads can kangaroo, and when babies are bigger some units encourage other family members to help as well (with permission of the parents). If you would like to hold your baby, talk to your baby's nurse. It also helps the team if you can share information about your schedule; kangaroo care is most beneficial if sessions last more than an hour, although any amount of touch will help your baby. Occasionally a baby is not stable enough to be transferred to a parent's chest, or there may be other reasons why kangaroo care is not an appropriate activity for that particular time. If this is the case, other forms of touch are still often appropriate.

You may feel nervous the first time you hold your baby, especially if he or she is very small. It gets easier. Parents say those hours spent holding their babies are the most precious memories of their time in the NICU.

What are other kinds of helpful touch?

If your baby is not having the kind of day that allows for kangaroo care, or if your time is limited, there are other kinds of touch that are helpful for both you and your baby.

Hand-hugging is when parents, with clean hands, place one hand on a baby's head and cup the other around the baby's bottom. This is especially appropriate for very new or fragile babies who may not be ready to be transferred to a parent's chest. When your baby is awake or upset, talk or sing to him or her while hand-hugging; she or he will hear your voice and will also feel your voice through your hands.

Modified kangaroo care or encircled holding is when the top of the incubator is removed, and the parent leans over the baby while the baby is still in the incubator. This is a wonderful way to connect with your baby. It doesn't necessarily last as long as a standard kangaroo care session, but parents report some of the same positive effects, especially with respect to milk production.

Why is it important to touch your baby?

Kangaroo care and other forms of parental touch will help you:

- Make more milk
- Connect to your baby
- Cope with the "baby blues"
- Prepare for breastfeeding
- Protect your baby from infection

Kangaroo care will help your baby:

- Sleep better
- Cry less
- Maintain body temperature
- Breathe better
- Gain weight
- Develop his or her brain
- Feel less pain

Tips for touch

- Always visit the bathroom and have something to eat and drink before a kangaroo care session.
- Moms, think about your pumping schedule and when might be the best time to pump. You may find that you produce more milk right after a long kanga care session.
- Most hospitals are scent-free; this is especially important for kangaroo care. Babies prefer your natural smell over the smell of perfume, skin cream, cologne or smoke.
- Check in with your baby's nurse or with the team at rounds about what kind of touch is best for your baby that day, and what time will work best. You can also call in to discuss timing with your baby's nurse.