

# Kangaroo Care for Infants

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Handling of a premature or sick baby is a skill which can positively impact on not only the infant, but to the parents. Touch is critical to an infant's neurological and physiological development. It is one of the best ways for parents to bond with their baby while in the NICU (and even after the baby is discharged to home). Kangaroo care, is also referred to as skin to skin holding, is relatively new in the United States just starting here in the 1980's. Kangaroo Care was recognized in 1979 in Bogota, Colombia where there were increasing number of parents who were disengaged with their babies and a lack of incubators to keep their babies warm. The medical staff started asking parents to put their babies to their chest (skin to skin) and to their surprise, the babies began to thrive and parents were bonding with their babies. Breastfeeding improved once kangaroo care was completed and babies were able to maintain their temperatures. Medical professionals and researchers were conducting studies as of the 1990's on this new concept of skin to skin holding.

Kangaroo care comes from the actual kangaroo and their ability to hold their young in the front pouch near the mother's breast. The young kangaroo would stay warm, feed and grow because of that skin to skin contact with the mother. In today's NICU's, it is one of the earliest ways for parents to touch and bond with their baby. This practice is more common place in most NICU's and as mentioned before, can be used once the parents take their baby home.

There are many benefits of kangaroo care for the baby such as temperature regulation, positive touch, decreased episodes of periodic breathing, deeper sleep state, weight gain, reduced stress and better infant self regulation abilities. There are also parent benefits of kangaroo care too. Some of those benefits is parent attachment, improving parent confidence in a stressful NICU environment, decreased parental stress levels, increased lactation from mothers, and increased parent responsiveness to their baby. This very simple, but powerful activity is the biggest and only activity that the parents alone can perform and feel they are truly parenting their baby in the NICU environment.