

The following suggestions are provided as information only. If you have any concerns about your particular situation, check with your babies' physician or other healthcare professional.

Definition:

Kangaroo care is a strategy where an infant is held skin-to-skin against the chest of an adult, usually a parent. It is highly recommended by physicians as a best practice for newborn infants, especially preterm or low birth weight infants. Ideally kangaroo care would begin with preterm infants right after birth and continue up to 6 months of age, if possible. However, even short periods of kangaroo care time are also beneficial to babies and parents. "Kangaroo care enables both mothers and fathers to care for and nurture their fragile infant and promotes family health during a time of great stress. Kangaroo care enhances breastfeeding and may contribute to improved neurodevelopmental outcome" (Canadian Pediatric Society, March 2012).

Process:

Mom and/or dad/partner are usually wearing an over-sized shirt, large hospital gown or loose clothing exposing their chest. The nearly naked (diaper and cap only) infant is placed directly on mother or father's exposed chest and the shirt is wrapped snugly around baby, drawing him or her into the parent's chest where he or she settles and snuggles. Instead of a shirt, a warm blanket can be used to cover the infant and draw him or her close. Kangaroo care is recommended for a minimum of one-hour intervals to minimize the disruption to the baby and can continue as long as baby and caregiver are comfortable.

Multiples may receive kangaroo care from either parent holding them together, at the same time. If babies are well enough and parents are comfortable with it, they may kangaroo two babies at a time on their chest. Kangaroo care with more than one baby can be done with appropriate support from a NICU nurse or other parent. Multiple babies' leads (wires) may make it more awkward to carry out multiple kangaroo care, but it's worth trying, as long as the babies are strong enough and staff advises it is safe to do so. Providing kangaroo care to more than one baby at a time will provide greater opportunity for the babies to bond with each other, as well as with mother or father.

Benefits for Babies:

- Helps stabilize heart rate and regulates breathing
- Improves oxygen saturation levels
- Results in more rapid weight gain

- Helps maintain baby's body warmth
- Makes babies easily accessible for breastfeeding
- Helps relax and sooth babies, resulting in less time crying
- Increases alert time
- Allows baby to hear heartbeat, replicating womb experience
- May contribute to earlier hospital discharge

Benefits for Parents:

- Builds confidence knowing they are offering their infants intimate care and a loving start
- Facilitates early closeness to babies and promotes bonding
- Makes babies easily accessible for breastfeeding

References

<http://www.lllc.ca/category/faq-categories/skin-skin-contact>

<http://www.cps.ca/documents/position/kangaroo-care-for-preterm-infant>

www.marchofdimes.com/baby/inthenicu_kangaroocare.html

www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/kangaroocare.asp

www.kangaroomothercare.com

Recommended Sources of Information:

MBC Premie Peer Support Network

Documents and Articles

Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets on various multiple birth related topics.

Multiple Births Canada

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