

## Fact Sheet

### Kangaroo care for premature babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

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#### What is Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo Care is a special way to hold your baby close to your skin, similar to the way kangaroos keep their young in their pouch. It is a type of 'skin-to-skin' care especially developed for premature babies.

Kangaroo Care can be provided (given) by mums and partners. It is common to feel nervous about holding your baby at first but the earlier you do it, the sooner you will become confident with caring for your baby.

#### How do you provide Kangaroo Care?

Wearing only their nappy, and possibly a hat, your baby is placed chest to chest on your bare skin between your breasts, or on your partner's bare chest. You and baby are then covered with a blanket which creates a snugly pouch for your baby. Kangaroo Care is recommended for a minimum (at least) one hour at a time.

#### Why do we do Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo Care for premature babies was originally started in Columbia in the 1980s and has been found to provide many benefits for premature babies and their parents.

Benefits for your baby include:

- Keeps your baby stable with less breathing problems (desaturations) and heart rate changes (bradycardias). Babies have less oxygen requirement.
- Helps keep your baby warm.
- Increases your baby's deep and quiet sleep.
- Babies gain weight more quickly.

- Decreases baby's risk of infection.
- Babies are more settled, cry less often and seem to experience less pain.
- Helps successful breastfeeding.
- Babies stay in hospital for a shorter time.

Benefits for you and your partner include:

- Improves your breast milk production and your chances of breastfeeding successfully.
- Helps you and your partner bond with your baby.
- Helps you and your partner build confidence in caring for your baby which potentially reduces stress and anxiety.

Parents who provide Kangaroo Care for their babies tell us how joyful the experience is and that they feel closer to their baby.



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#### When will my baby be ready for Kangaroo Care?

Every baby is different, so you will need to discuss with the staff caring for your baby when he/she will be stable enough for you to start Kangaroo Care. Your baby's breathing, heart rate and other physical signs need to be stable, and there must be nursing staff available to support you while giving Kangaroo Care.

Babies can vary from day to day and so decisions about giving Kangaroo Care on any given day may depend on how your baby is feeling. Your baby's safety and stability is always our most important consideration.

#### What can I do to be ready for Kangaroo Care?

There are several important things you can do to help:

- Shower before coming into the hospital for Kangaroo Care and avoid wearing perfumes. Perfumes and strong odour can upset your baby.
- Please do not smoke before Kangaroo Care, as residual smoke can be harmful to your baby.
- Wear loose, easy to remove clothing or change into a hospital gown.
- Try to express breastmilk before Kangaroo Care.
- Go to the bathroom before starting care.
- Keep a water bottle nearby.
- You may want to bring a hand mirror so you can watch your baby's face during Kangaroo Care.

Remember that for your baby to get the maximum benefit from a deep and peaceful sleep, you need to provide Kangaroo Care for at least one hour on each occasion.

The most difficult part of providing Kangaroo Care is getting your baby in and out of the incubator. The nurse looking after your baby will help you with this.

#### Monitoring your baby during Kangaroo Care

While your baby is receiving Kangaroo Care, the staff looking after him/her will need to check regularly that all is well. The following will be monitored:

- Temperature – this is done by placing a thermometer under your baby's armpit. If she/he becomes too warm, the blanket will be changed for a thinner sheet.
- Heart rate
- Breathing
- Oxygen saturation (amount of oxygen in your baby's blood)

**Kangaroo Care is a rewarding experience for parents and beneficial for your premature baby. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask NICU staff for more information.**

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#### When should Kangaroo Care be stopped?

The nurse caring for your baby may feel that she/he is not stable enough and will need to place your baby back in their crib.

It is normal for babies to be somewhat unstable during the first 15 minutes after transfer, but they should settle after this time.



We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Please send your feedback to:

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