

# Why is Kangaroo Care Important for My NICU Baby and Me?

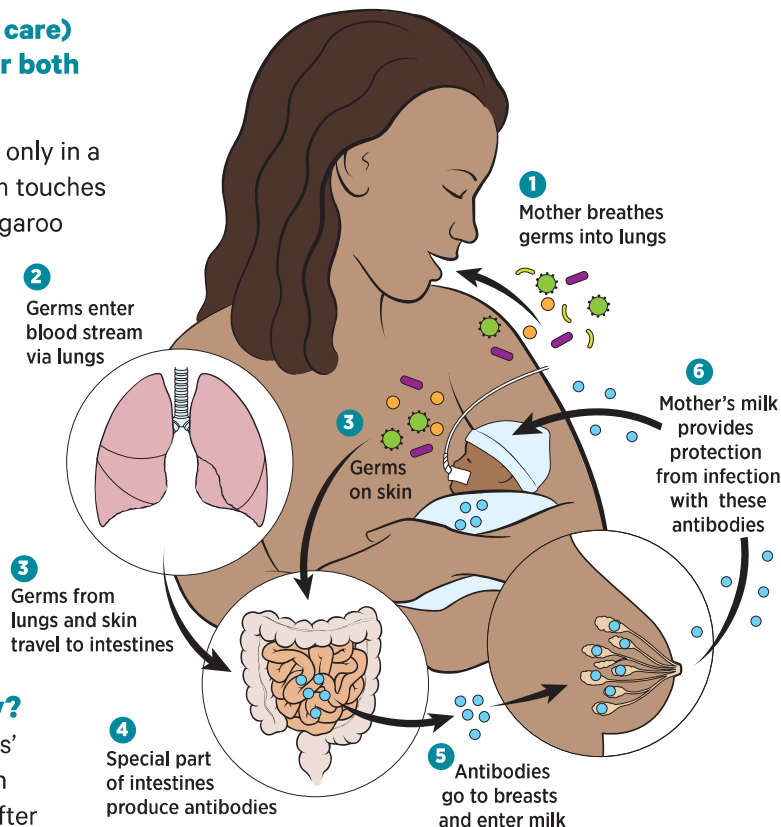
**Kangaroo care (also called skin-to-skin care) is an important part of the NICU stay for both you and your baby.**

In kangaroo care, you hold your baby, clothed only in a diaper, between your breasts so that your skin touches your baby's skin, as shown in the picture. Kangaroo care started over 40 years ago in Central and South America when doctors asked mothers to live in the hospital and hold their premature babies in kangaroo care to keep them warm. The doctors found that kangaroo care lowered babies' infection rates and allowed them to go home sooner. These *Mother Kangaroo* programs were promoted by the World Health Organization and led to more research about benefits for mothers and NICU babies.

## Does kangaroo care benefit my baby?

Researchers have compared premature babies' reactions when they are in kangaroo care with their mothers and in the isolette before and after kangaroo care. These studies show many benefits of kangaroo care for premature and other NICU babies:

- **Stable body temperature.** The mother adjusts her skin temperature so that the baby's temperature stays normal.
- **Stable heart and breathing rates.** Heart and breathing rates improve.
- **Improved blood oxygen level.** The oxygen level often increases, and some babies need less breathing help from CPAP or the respirator.
- **Better sleep.** Babies spend more time in deep sleep. In deep sleep, babies relax, and **growth hormone** is released from the brain. Better sleep helps your baby recover, gain weight and promotes healthy brain development.
- **Protection from infection.** Your baby puts germs that he/she may have contacted onto your skin and you breathe them into your lungs. Then, a special part of your intestines, called **Peyer's Patches**, makes one-of-a-kind protective substances, called **antibodies**, to fight these specific germs. These antibodies travel from your intestine to your breasts and pass into the milk for your baby, reducing the chances of infection. This body function, called the **enteromammary pathway**, is personalized medicine that only a mother can provide her NICU baby.



## What will I feel in kangaroo care?

Mothers say that holding their NICU babies in kangaroo care is when they feel like a **real mother**, and that frequent kangaroo care helps them relax, cope with stress, learn how to comfort their babies, and make more milk. It is an important part of healing for both you and your baby.

## Is my baby really ready for kangaroo care?

Mothers often worry whether it is too soon to start kangaroo care, and think they are selfish for wanting to hold their NICU babies as soon as possible after birth. Rest assured that the NICU staff will recommend kangaroo care only when it is safe for your baby. NICU nurses are experts at moving babies into kangaroo care with breathing equipment, IVs, monitors and other tubes and wires. Many NICU procedures can be done while babies are in kangaroo care, including giving feedings and medications, suctioning, changing diapers and measuring vital signs. Still, it is normal to feel nervous in the beginning, but these feelings will pass quickly once you witness your baby snuggle into your chest, relax and feel safe. *You will sense that your baby knows he/she is united again with MOM*, and recognizes your familiar smell and heartbeat, learning quickly to tell your touch from that of the NICU nurses and doctors.

Ludington-Hoe. (2011). *Neonatal Network* 30: 357-362.

Kaffashi et al. (2013). *Clinical Neurophysiology* 124: 238-246.

Seidman et al. (2015). *PLoS ONE* 5: e0125643.

El-Farrash et al. (2020). *Pediatr Res* 87: 683-688.

Created by: Paula Meier, PhD, RN;  
Aloka Patel, MD and Judy Janes, RN, IBCLC

RUSH

Funded by: FAMILY LARSSON ROSENQUIST FOUNDATION



## Disclaimer

This general information sheet is intended for use under the guidance of health professionals in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). It is primarily for training purposes and for additional information to be given to parents or private persons without medical education by NICU health professionals. The general information sheets provided by Rush University Medical Center are for parents and interested private persons without medical education and we do not raise any claim to completeness of the information sheets. Under no circumstances should this information be regarded as a substitute for professional advice or treatment or for any independent medical judgment of a healthcare professional regarding specific patient diagnoses or treatment plans. Healthcare providers should exercise their own independent medical judgment, and decisions as to any diagnosis or treatment plan are the sole responsibility of such healthcare provider. The general content of this information sheet cannot and shall not be used to make independent diagnoses or begin treatment. Our information is not personally related to you. We therefore recommend that you visit recognised healthcare professionals to get specific advice for any medical problems.

This information sheet was published on [www.LactaHub.org](http://www.LactaHub.org) on 4 August 2020. It is provided in good faith. We will be happy to provide you with further information and guidance.

We look forward to your inquiry at: [contact@lactahub.org](mailto:contact@lactahub.org)