



# **Skin-to-skin**

with your premature baby



# Your newborn baby may but you have a lot



*"Spending time skin-to-skin with your baby can be very special, even magical; with skin-to-skin you are able to recreate the supportive environment that was interrupted by premature birth."*

**Elise's mother**

Your baby has been born early.  
He is small, he needs a lot of medical attention and care,  
but it is you, his parents, who will be the most important  
provider of support as he begins to grow.

This is one of the reasons why, when you feel ready and  
as soon as your baby is stable enough,  
neonatal staff will encourage you to hold your baby  
directly against you

## skin-to-skin

# be small and sensitive...

## to offer as a parent!

*"At first, the staff suggested I spend 30-45 minutes skin-to-skin with Sarha. With her directly against my skin, I could feel her little life there close to me. I could feel that she was really there. It was amazing! When I was feeling down I felt the need to hold her against me. Skin-to-skin is about really getting to know your child."*

**Sarha's mother**



*"The first skin-to-skin can be scary, like you are going to break your tiny, fragile baby. Once the baby has settled into a good position, though, it is immediately reassuring for the baby and it feels right. Being skin-to-skin with your baby is a different state of being altogether."*

**Nathan's mother**

*"At the beginning, I just watched.... Being close to the baby like that seemed like a need that was less instinctive for me than for my wife. Then, later, I wanted to try myself.... It blew me away, in a good way. It was incredible to be in that moment, together, all three of us."*

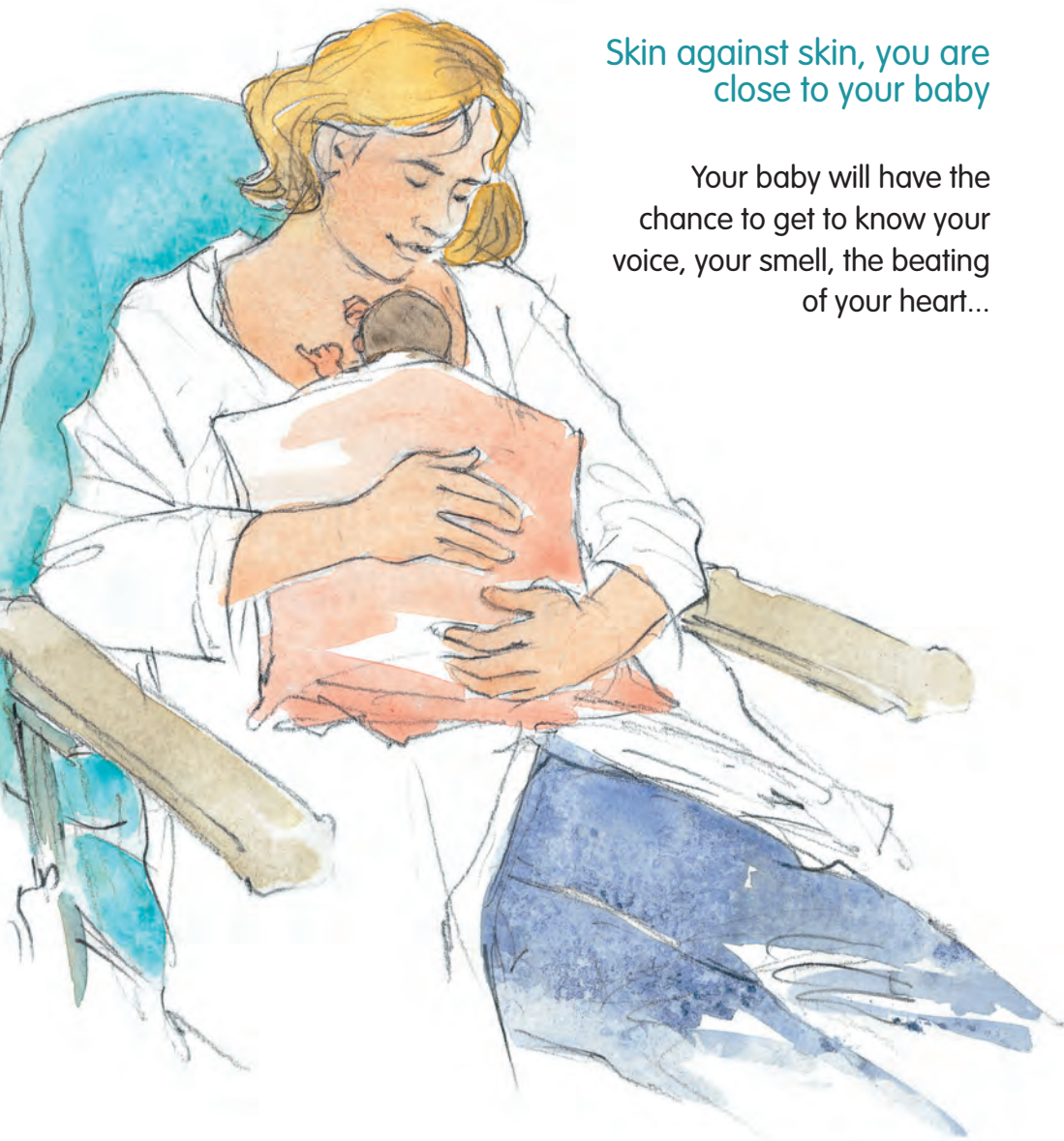
**Mayli's father**



# The benefits

Skin against skin, you are  
close to your baby

Your baby will have the  
chance to get to know your  
voice, your smell, the beating  
of your heart...



Re-establishing the intimacy that was cut short by premature birth, skin-to-skin helps you find the self-confidence you need to form the close bond that is so important for your baby.



# of skin-to-skin

Against your skin, your baby  
will stay warm

With skin-to-skin you pass your warmth directly to your baby. It is important to make sure that your baby does not get cold during the transfer between you and the incubator.



Against you, your baby sleeps  
more peacefully

With skin-to-skin your baby will sleep more restfully and for longer. These periods of sleep are essential for the growth of your baby and are times of rest and recovery after medical procedures.



# The benefits

Reassured by direct contact with you, your baby will breathe more easily and have a more regular heartbeat

In the majority of cases, a baby's heart beat and breathing are more regular and more rhythmic during skin-to-skin, and the 'alarm systems' are triggered less during these times.

Certain necessary medical treatments may also be given to the baby during skin-to-skin.

Doing this reduces the baby's discomfort, and allows for quicker recovery



# of skin-to-skin

The benefits of skin-to-skin are also positive when done by the father

Some fathers see this time as something that should be reserved for the mother.

On the other hand, some mothers are happy to share this time with the father.

There is no one right answer for everyone.

Each couple must decide for themselves.

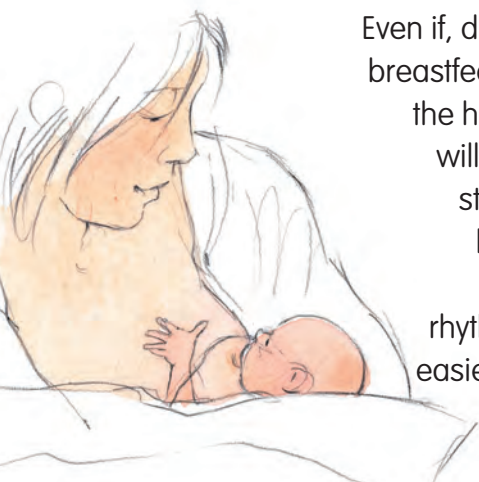
The doctors and nurses will respect your choice whichever it may be.

Skin-to-skin with the mother has special benefits as it helps her to produce breast milk, and her body temperature can adjust to regulate the baby's temperature.



## If you wish to breastfeed your baby

Even if, directly after birth, your baby is still too small to breastfeed, the skin-to-skin contact will help stimulate the hormones responsible for milk production and will support optimal milk production for when he starts feeding. Later, when he is ready to begin breastfeeding, holding your baby skin-to-skin allows you to follow your baby's own feeding rhythm and readiness cues more closely and it is easier to put him to your breast when he wants or needs to feed.



# Practicing

## When?

### As soon as your baby is ready

In the very first days of your baby's life, she may have difficulty adapting to all the sounds, lights and sensations that she is being exposed to for the first time.

Leaving the protection of the incubator may require too much energy for your baby at first. In this case, you may be able to have contact with your baby by gently placing your hands on her body, and by giving her your finger to hold.



The neonatal team will let you know when your baby is ready for skin-to-skin.

### Preferably when your baby is awake

Respecting the sleep of a premature baby is very important: it is preferable to wait until your baby is rousing from sleep on her own before lifting her out of her bed. As your baby starts to wake you may gently help her to rouse by putting your hands on her, talking to her, explaining to her that she will be able to fall back to sleep once she is lying against you. Neonatal staff will be nearby as needed and will be able to help you find the right moment to take your baby in your arms.





# skin-to-skin

## When you feel confident enough

For the first few times you do skin-to-skin it is normal to feel hesitant. Your baby seems so delicate. Your baby's nurse will be there with you if you wish and will stay as long as you need.

After a while, when your baby no longer needs specific medical treatments, you will no longer need help from the nurse for skin-to-skin.

## For how long?

You may hold your baby skin-to-skin for as long as you like

One hour, two hours, or longer....

It all depends on you, and is variable from person to person. Set aside sufficient time for you and your baby to get the most out of your time together.

The staff are there to help you and will try to adapt to your needs as best they can so that you can enjoy as much skin-to-skin time as possible.



# Skin-to-skin

## 1 - Getting ready

Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing and a top that opens down the front.

Pull your hair back. Wash your hands the way you were shown when you came to the neonatal unit.



## 2 - Your baby's nurse will help you to get comfortable and in the right position for skin-to-skin care

You should be sitting in a semi-reclined position with your legs slightly raised.

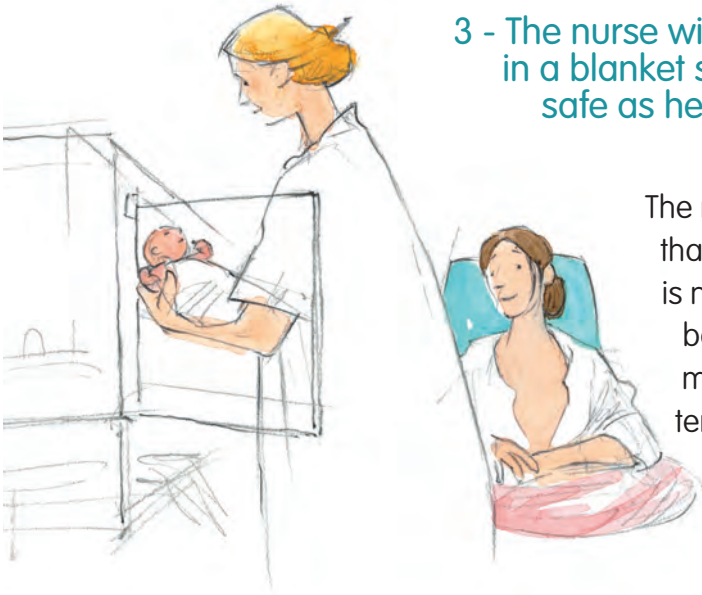
Open your top ready for your baby to go on your chest.

If your baby is dressed you will need to gently remove his clothing.



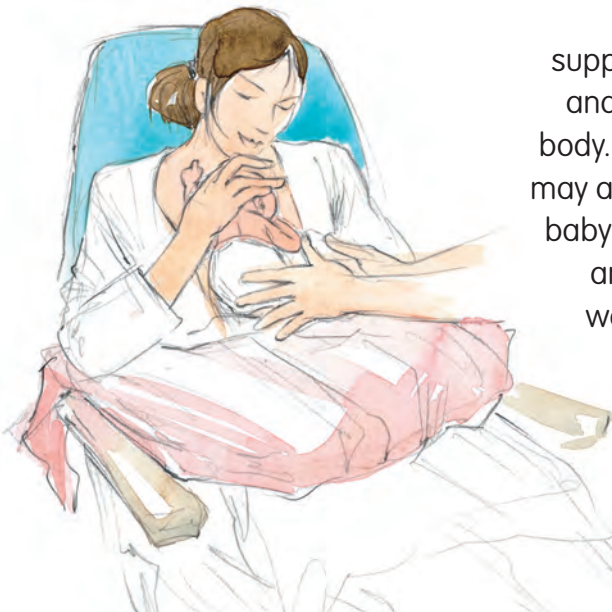
# steps

## 3 - The nurse will wrap your baby in a blanket so that he will feel safe as he is brought to you



The nurse will make sure that lighting in the room is not too bright for your baby and may put the monitoring devices on temporary mute mode while your baby is moved to you.

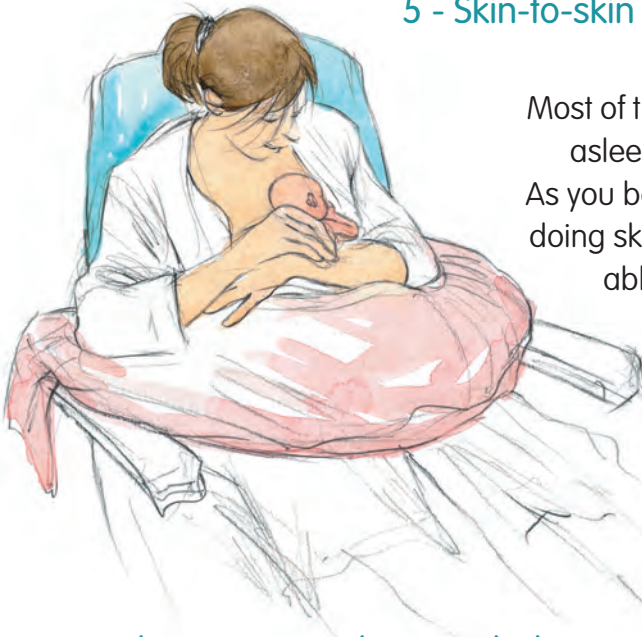
## 4 - When your baby is lying against your chest



support his head with one hand and place the other around his body. A piece of stretchable cloth may also be used to support your baby. Your baby may need a hat and booties to help him stay warm, and a blanket to cover his back.

The nurse will then return the monitoring device to normal mode.

## 5 - Skin-to-skin is great for your baby



Most of the time your baby will fall asleep while lying against you. As you become more comfortable doing skin-to-skin you will also be able to relax with your baby.

## 6 – When you signal to your baby's nurse she will help you return your baby to the incubator

Separation at this point may be difficult for you and your baby. Take your time.

You can help your baby to fall back to sleep in the incubator by staying next to her, talking quietly to her, cupping her head in your warm hands, or by leaving a cloth with your smell on it in the incubator.





# Questions... Answers...

Your baby is tiny and fragile...

You are hesitant...

You are afraid of being clumsy...

You are afraid of hurting your baby...

You want a little more privacy

The neonatal team are there to help you, to respond to your concerns and questions, and to assist you with anything that may come up during skin-to-skin.

## How many days should I wait before my baby is ready for skin-to-skin?

A few days, a week... the time varies for each baby. Skin-to-skin is suggested as an option as soon as a baby is able to leave the incubator without problems. You may not have to wait at all.

## I'm afraid I will make my baby ill...

It is important to be aware of hygiene, especially because germs found in hospitals are typically more active and stronger than those found in your home. For you, as parents, paying attention to your personal daily hygiene, wearing clean clothes, and carefully washing your hands should be sufficient protection for your baby. In some cases you may be asked to take specific additional precautions.

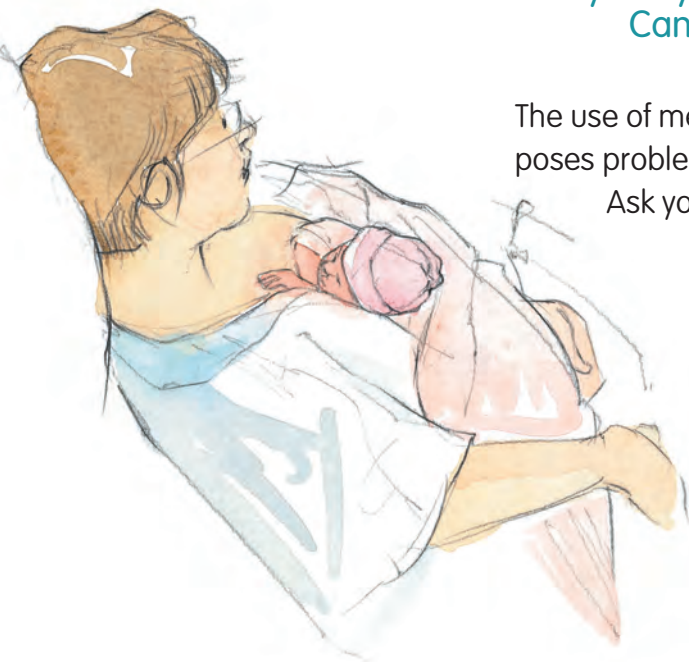


# Questions... Answers...

My baby has a catheter (drip).  
Can I still do skin-to-skin?

The use of medical equipment seldom poses problems for doing skin-to-skin.

Ask your baby's nurse or doctor about this.



What if something happens to my baby during skin-to-skin?

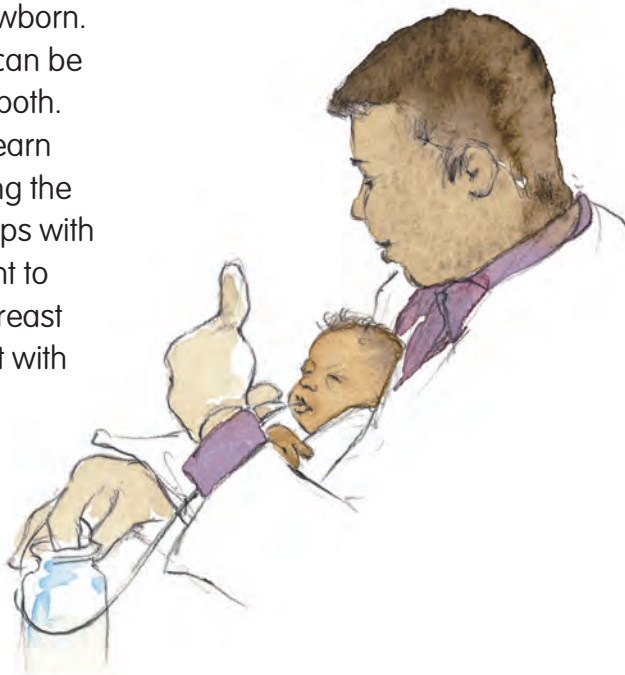
Your baby is premature, and things may happen even during skin-to-skin. Apnoea, for example, is very common with premature babies. Apnoea is when your baby momentarily stops breathing. The interruption is often very brief and is not harmful for your baby. However, it is very important for your baby's heart beat and breathing to be monitored. The neonatal staff will be available and attentive to you and your baby during times of skin-to-skin.



# Questions... Answers...

## Can I hold my baby during a tube feed?

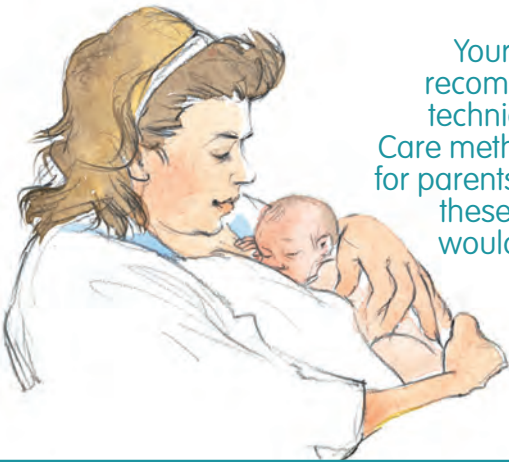
Yes. Feeding times are very important moments in the life of your newborn. Sharing these times with him can be particularly significant for you both. You can also help your baby learn how to suck by gently caressing the corners of his mouth and his lips with your finger. You may even want to express a few drops of your breast milk on his lips so he can lick it with his tongue.



## I don't know how to say "no"

Doing skin-to-skin must be a free choice and not an obligation. If you do not feel ready, or you do not want to do it, there is no reason to force yourself. Don't hesitate to tell the staff how you feel. They will respect your choice. There are many other ways to be close to your baby.





Your baby has been born prematurely. We recommended that you try 'skin-to-skin'. This technique, inspired by the Kangaroo Mother Care method, has many benefits for babies and for parents. The aim of this booklet is to describe these benefits and to help you decide if you would like to try skin-to-skin with your baby.

Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) started in Bogotá, Colombia in 1978. The method involves mothers (or fathers, or other family members) carrying their babies directly against their skin at all times, 24 hours a day. This method was proposed for prematurely-born babies by Doctor Rey and Doctor Martinez who worked in areas that had little or no access to incubators. Immediate results that were observed included a decreased number of infections in babies who had KMC. Other positive effects for the baby and mother included greater rates of successful breastfeeding and earlier discharge from hospital. Since its introduction, the use of KMC has spread to many other countries around the world.

This booklet was developed by:

Sara Lambin Bevilacqua, Véronique Causette, paediatric nurses, and Dr Véronique Pierrat

Neonatal Care Unit, Jeanne de Flandre Hospital, Lille

Céline Kreis, paediatric nurse, Department of Neonatal Care, Armentières Hospital

Françoise Galland and Sandrine Herrenschildt, SPARADRAP Association, France

With the help of:

Dr Nadine Kacel, Dr Véronique Lemaître, Anne-Cécile Brethe, and the NICU health care staff, Neonatal Care Unit,

Jeanne de Flandre Hospital, Lille

Sylvie Boudringhien, director, School for Paediatric Nursing, CHRU, Lille

*In memory of Dr Christine Duquennoy*

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SPARADRAP Association

48, rue de la Plaine 75020 Paris

Tel: (+33) 01 43 48 11 80

[www.sparadrap.org](http://www.sparadrap.org)

Coordination and proof-reading: Myriam Bliidi

Graphic Design: Sandrine Herrenschildt

Watercolours: Noelle Herrenschildt

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Sam Segal Unit

2nd Floor Clarence Memorial Wing

St Mary's Hospital

London W2 1NY

Tel: 020 3312 6773

[www.winnicott.org.uk](http://www.winnicott.org.uk)

Registered Charity No. 292668

9 Holyrood Street

London

SE1 2EL

[www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)

† 020 7378 1122

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*Improving care for premature and sick babies*



for babies born too soon,  
too small, too sick

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