



Kangaroo Care

Kangaroo care, or skin-to-skin care, involves having an unclothed infant (wearing diapers only) lay directly on a parent's chest. Instruct the parent to remove all jewelry and not wear any perfume, and discourage the use of cell phones during this time. If a parent is a smoker, ask him or her to bring a clean shirt to the hospital and change into it before participating in skin-to-skin care. You may have to ask them to wash their chest prior to kangaroo care, as well. A standing transfer is preferred because it is less disruptive for the baby. The family member can prepare himself or herself while the nurse prepares the baby. The process of providing kangaroo care will take at least 1 hour, so the infant and family member should be prepared for this extended experience.

Nurse preparations are as follows: change the diaper, then assess and record the infant's status, including temperature, oxygen saturations, vital signs, breath sounds, and position of indwelling tubes. Suction the endotracheal tube if necessary. Place a blanket under the infant and position supine next to the door of the isolette. The family member can then open his or her shirt, place their hands under the blanket, and draw the baby toward his or her chest. If the infant is intubated, ask for help from another nurse or a respiratory therapist to help maintain tubes and lines in place. Disconnecting briefly from the ventilator during the transfer process is advised.

Alternatively, the family member can be seated and the nurse can perform the transfer, placing the infant on the family member's chest. The infant is then covered with a warm blanket and a hat is placed on the infant's head. Position the baby flexed with the head in a sniffing position to maintain the baby's airway. Help the family member get into a comfortable position.

Once the baby has settled into place, continue to frequently monitor the baby, including vital signs and respiratory status. Set the isolette temperature to maintain a neutral thermal environment until the baby is returned to the bed. Benefits of this activity include pleasant sensory stimulation to the infant, increased oxygenation, stability of respirations, and enhanced bonding. Other benefits include regulation of heart rate, temperature, and a decrease in infections. This activity can be continued at home after the infant is discharged.

Bibliography

- Kenner, C., & McGrath, J. M. (Eds.). (2010). *Developmental care of newborns and infants* (2nd ed.). Glenview, IL: National Association of Neonatal Nurses.
- Verklan, M., & Walden, M. (2004). *Core curriculum for neonatal intensive care nursing* (3rd ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders.



Kangaroo Care: Information for Parents

Kangaroo care is a way of holding a sick baby so that there is skin-to-skin contact with the parent. It is used to help form the special mother-baby bond following sudden separation during the birth experience. Kangaroo care is important for fathers, too!

There are many benefits to kangaroo care. These include keeping your baby warm, helping your baby gain weight, improving your baby's heart rate and oxygen level, and increasing mom's milk supply, as well as increasing the special antibodies in the breast milk that help protect your baby from infection. Some research shows long-term effects include helping with your baby's brain function and growth.



Skin-to-skin care. Courtesy of Susan Ise, BSN RN, and Alyssa Kendrick, BSN RN.

Here's what you need to know about kangaroo care:

- This type of holding your baby usually begins before a feeding and continues for the duration of the feeding. Talk to your nurse about how kangaroo care is done in your baby's unit.
- You will hold your baby for at least 1 hour and up to 3 hours.
- Use the bathroom before kangaroo care.
- Mom or dad will open his or her shirt. (Button-down shirts work well and can be left at the bedside. Mom will want to remove her bra.)
- A standing transfer is easiest for the baby. The nurse will initially assist you in preparing the baby for transfer. He or she will place a blanket under the baby and secure any tubes that may be necessary. You will stand next to the baby's isolette, place your hands under the blanket, and draw the baby toward your chest while the team assists you with maintaining secure tubes and lines. Once you have the baby secure against your chest, you can step backwards toward the chair and sit. Alternatively, the nurse will place your baby on your chest after you sit down. Some units may have special chairs designed just for kangaroo care.
- Your baby will be covered snugly with a blanket.
- Do not wear chains or necklaces.
- No loud conversations with visitors should take place during this time.
- For the safety of your baby, please do not sleep while holding your baby. Your nurse will check on you and your baby frequently during kangaroo care. Use of cell phones is not recommended during your visit in the NICU.

As soon as your baby is stable enough to hold, you may start kangaroo care. We strongly encourage this special type of holding at least once per day. The wonderful thing about kangaroo care is that you can continue it even after you are home.