

What is Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo Care (cuddle) is a concept that is used worldwide in the care of new-born babies. It is a phrase that was developed because of the similarity to the marsupial's way of carrying their young protected in their pouch.

In the NICU environment kangaroo care is a way of holding babies skin to skin; a baby is undressed down to their nappy and placed on the parents' bare chest. The parent (mums and dads) often wear a gown of some sort with an opening at the front so not to be too exposed. A blanket (and maybe a hat) is then placed over baby for warmth.

Benefits of Kangaroo Care

All of baby's early developing senses are stimulated during kangaroo care - warmth, rise and fall of the chest, tactile sensation of skin to skin (vestibular), smell of parents and maternal breast (olfactory) and hearing of parents voice, breathing sounds and heartbeat (auditory).

Reported physical advantages of kangaroo care for baby include maintenance of skin temperature, improved breathing and heart rate and oxygen saturations increased frequency/duration of quiet sleep; less time crying and lower activity levels.

Advantage for parent's are reported as increased bonding and attachment, increase in parents' ability to read baby's cues and therefore increased confidence and decreased parental anxiety.

Mothers who practise kangaroo cares can have an increase in oxytocin and thus increase milk production.

Can all babies have Kangaroo Care?

Most babies in NICU are able to have kangaroo care even if they require breathing support with CPAP; **however** they must be medically stable enough to do so. Babies born before 27 weeks will need to wait until they are a couple of weeks old: this is due to their fragility of their circulation of blood to/from the brain and also their ability to keep warm.

Babies who have umbilical lines and/or arterial lines aren't able to come out for a cuddle due to the risk of these being dislodged. Ventilated babies generally aren't able to have kangaroo cares due to the same reason; however in some exceptional circumstances this can be arranged. Nursing and medical staff are available to discuss whether babies are able to have kangaroo care.

Parents of stable babies who now have a corrected age of 30 weeks gestation and are two weeks of age may be able to lift their baby out for a kangaroo cuddle themselves instead of nursing staff. Please talk to the nursing staff if you feel ready to do this. This may also be the time when it is good for baby to have twice daily kangaroo care.

Equipment and Environment

Kangaroo care takes careful planning by staff to arrange a safe transfer and create an environment needed for successful kangaroo care. There will be certain times in the routine of the ward that are unsuitable for kangaroo care, such as immediately prior to staff handover times, during extended family visiting period and if there is a medical emergency in the baby's room.

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A successful environment for kangaroo care is one with dimmed lights and reduced noise, allowing parents to have a quiet resting and bonding time with their baby. We have small mirrors available so parents can see their baby's face during the cuddle. We ask that you refrain from using mobile (cell) phones while cuddling your baby; this is for infection control purposes and for the neurodevelopmental wellbeing of your baby.

Ideally Kangaroo care should be longer than an hour in duration and occur once a day in the initial period. You may have read in other countries parents are able to cuddle their baby for extended periods of time. In this NICU there are some environmental barriers that make this option difficult (e.g. shared rooms, limited space, access to resuscitation equipment). We also need to consider a baby's cues and capabilities. Nursing staff will accommodate parents' wishes as much as possible. If baby becomes unstable or distressed the kangaroo care may need to be for a shorter period. Immediately following kangaroo care is an optimal time to express milk due to the release of oxytocin and its effects on the production of breastmilk.

If you have any further questions or concerns about the care of your baby, please talk to the nurse and medical team caring for your baby.

Contact us

NICU Direct Dial Number

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