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**NICU Kangaroo Care**

The machine goes off again. A nurse comes in to check the oxygen monitor and your baby moves a leg wrapped in lines of clear tubes flowing fluid to her blood for support. The NICU can be a stressful and overwhelming place. Each decision seems to weigh more, and time slows to a crawl. Thoughts and emotions appear to hold more weight. Through all the anxious feelings and critical decisions, time stands still when you’re holding your baby, even if you’re still in the NICU.

Kangaroo care is a universal NICU program designed to help moms hold and care for their newborns. The act of skin-to-skin contact between mom and baby has profound physiological impacts.

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| *Improved weight gain* | *Increased breastfeeding outcomes* |
| *Cardiorespiratory stability* | *Decreased hospital length of stay* |
| *Increased thermoregulation* | *Analgesia and reduced maternal stress* |

Infants that are held for long periods of time in great frequency can show improvements in weight gain, increased periods of wakefulness and arousal, and decreased signs of stress. Especially important for the infant with Prader-Willi Syndrome, babies who are held often in the NICU demonstrate greater temperature regulation, decreased resting heart rate, and require less supplemental oxygen while being held.¹ These changes over time decreased apnea rates and lead to quicker discharges from the NICU. Depending on how early your baby was born and their skin maturity, mother and baby skin-to-skin holding can start with the help of NICU nurses. They will make sure each line, tube, and blanket are safely attached while you hold and nurture you baby.

The great changes that occur while infant holding doesn’t stop with baby. The parental bond grows stronger each time baby is held. Often, parents don’t have the chance to cuddle and gaze upon their small new image of life born just minutes ago. Instead, lifesaving medical intervention is needed, and parents miss this bonding moment just after birth. Holding your newborn improves the maternal bond. Mothers see improved milk production from holding their infant and experience decreased stress responses.² The important emotional connection between mom and baby can be strengthened even if the environment is less than ideal.

Lines might hang from your newborn’s arms, mask pushing oxygen into freshly opened lungs, but you Mama, are the lifeline of sustained support. A small ear pressed up against your chest hearing the familiar beating of soul connecting soul sustains the fragile life that grows stronger each day with one more hold.

**References**

1. Felicity Hunt, The importance of kangaroo care on infant oxygen saturation levels and bonding, Journal of Neonatal Nursing, Volume 14, Issue 2, 2008, Pages 47-51, ISSN 1355-1841,  https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnn.2007.12.003. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1355184107002025>)
2. Cho ES, Kim SJ, Kwon MS, Cho H, Kim EH, Jun EM, Lee S. The Effects of Kangaroo Care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit on the Physiological Functions of Preterm Infants, Maternal-Infant Attachment, and Maternal Stress. J Pediatr Nurs. 2016 Jul-Aug;31(4):430-8. doi: 10.1016/j.pedn.2016.02.007. Epub 2016 Mar 11. PMID: 26975461.