



## **Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC): The bonding between mother and baby.**

by Krystal So,  
South Africa

Have you heard of the term “Kangaroo Mother Care” or “KMC”? The doctors or nurses may have mentioned the term to you while your baby was in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. They may have also explained to you what Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) is and how to do it. KMC is a technique used where the baby is naked and lies on the mother’s bare chest. Thus, the baby’s skin touches the mother’s skin. This article will be looking at what KMC is, the history behind it, how to do KMC and what the benefits of KMC are.

### ***The KMC history and what exactly is it.***

KMC was developed by two doctors Dr Edgar Rey and Dr Hector Martinez, in Bogota, Columbia in the late 1970s<sup>1</sup>. It was developed due to a lack of incubators. An incubator is a plastic see through box in which babies who are ill or who were born prematurely (before 9 months gestational age) are placed in. This is in order to help control the baby’s temperature) in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). KMC is based on the manner in which the Kangaroo Mother looks after her young. The Kangaroo’s young is put into the mother’s pouch, where it is warm and the young gets his food. As mentioned earlier, KMC in humans is when the mother, just like the Kangaroo mother puts her baby in skin to skin contact with her chest. The baby’s skin thus comes into direct contact with the mother’s skin when the naked baby lies on the mother’s bare chest. The father can also do KMC. This method is for babies whose weight is less than 1800g (known as low birth weight) and/or babies born prematurely.



### ***How do you do KMC?***

To do KMC is pretty simple. The baby, only in her<sup>1</sup> nappy, has to lie between the mother's breasts (on her chest) where the head of the baby is either a bit higher than breasts or directly in between the breasts and the feet of the baby are just above the mother's stomach or on the mother's stomach<sup>2</sup>. The baby's head is turned to the side so that the ear is at the same level as the heart<sup>2</sup>. The baby can be on the chest for up to 24 hours or for sessions of at least 90 minutes at a time. The initiation of KMC will depend on your baby's physical health, or if you are able to stay with your baby in the NICU or not.. If your baby is very ill, you can start doing KMC in short sessions and little by little increase the sessions of KMC as your baby gets better<sup>1</sup>. If you are unable to stay in the NICU, then you need to do KMC as often as possible for the duration of your visit in order for your infant to benefit from KMC. Almost all parents of babies, who are born prematurely and/or who weigh less than 1800g, can do KMC with their babies<sup>1</sup>. Since the baby is close to the mother's breasts, it makes it easier for mom to breastfeed her baby; provided that the baby is well enough to be breastfed.

### ***What are the benefits of KMC?***

There are many benefits of KMC. Once the baby is held on the mother's chest and between the mother's breasts, the mother will automatically start to control the baby's temperature. This is known as thermal synchrony. There are studies to show that KMC helps the baby to gain weight and these babies are also discharged from the hospital earlier<sup>1, 2, 3, 4 and 5</sup>. The mother also benefits from KMC as KMC helps to increase the mother's milk production. KMC also helps with the development and improvement of bonding between mother and child and helps to relieve the stress that the mother feels as a result of the child being born preterm, small and/or sick<sup>1, 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of the simplicity, the sex of the baby will be referred to as she, her or herself



and <sup>4</sup>. Mothers who practice KMC feel more confident and have a sense of fulfilment. Another positive impact is that KMC helps with the baby's cognitive and motor development<sup>1, 4 and 5</sup>. Fathers can also do KMC and can thus give the mother a bit of a break.

### **Conclusion**

In this article we looked at what KMC is, and the main benefits of KMC. KMC should thus be used in all NICU's where premature and sick infants are cared for. As mentioned in this article it has benefits for both parents and their infants.

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