



Biological Nurturing versus Skin to Skin Contact (S2S)



Skin-to-skin (S2S) contact is defined formally as the mother naked from the waist up holding a nappy-clad baby prone on her chest. S2S contact keeps the baby warm and gives him unrestricted access to the breast. Although there are variations within the definition, research findings show that to benefit from the temperature regulation effect, bare skin contact between mother and baby is necessary. No clothing should be in between their bodies. Strictly speaking, therefore, the mother and baby in photo 'A' are NOT in S2S contact.

Many mothers really enjoy greeting their babies in S2S right after birth. Of course babies are born naked (we don't need research to prove this!) and mothers are often naturally in a state of undress while giving birth.



Photo © Lieve Huybrechts

S2S is so easy. It seems a natural extension from carrying a naked baby in the womb. Getting dressed right after birth would disturb these precious moments!



After the birth many mothers still enjoy naked S2S contact. However some find it embarrassing or uncomfortable to sustain for long periods. Some mothers say that S2S becomes hot or slippery. It can also be disconcerting to be the only person undressed in a room-full of people.

During the first weeks, if there are any breastfeeding problems, mothers are often told to undress and hold the baby S2S. This routine advice is usually given without any regard for things like mother-baby positions, the environmental temperature, the degree of privacy or the mother's preferences. It is as though **S2S contact is THE SOLUTION.**



This is S2S and BN



This is S2S but not BN



Is Biological Nurturing (BN) the same as Skin-to-skin contact?

Mothers doing BN are sometimes pictured in S2S. However BN works on body brushing and gravity, not level of dress. Gravity exerts a force whether mothers and babies are dressed or naked, upright, laid-back or on their sides. Recent research findings illustrate that when mothers sit upright, inborn baby reflexes can be released as breastfeeding barriers thwarting latch as the baby sucks his fingers, kicks with his feet, boxes the breast with his arms, bobs his head or shakes his head from side-to-side, rooting and fighting against gravity.



The Difference between Biological Nurturing and S2S Contact

Biological Nurturing (BN) Concerned with positions

Skin-to-Skin (S2S) Concerned with level of dress

- * There is no dress code; mother and baby are lightly dressed or naked
- * Mother sits laid-back; Baby is always on top with the entire front of his body facing and closely touching mother's body or part of the environment
- * Mother does not have to hold the baby applying back, head or neck pressure
- * Developed to increase BF initiation, enjoyment and duration
- * BN keeps mothers and babies together in a species-specific habitat. Level of dress is not the priority rather positional interactions are believed to release inborn mother/baby breast feeding behaviours
- * People promoting BN suggest that comfort helps mothers relax and focus on their babies. This releases parenting behaviours

- * Mother is naked from waist up; baby is naked or wears a nappy
- * Mother is in any position—upright, laid back, lying flat on her back or on her side
- * Baby is either on top (in BN) or held closely to the breast in a cradle, cross-cradle or rugby hold or parallel to the mother during side-lying
- * Developed to keep preterm babies warm and help them stabilise, catch-up and grow
- * S2S contact keeps mothers and babies together in a species-specific habitat but positions are not the priority; rather bare skin contact is believed to be essential to release inborn breastfeeding behaviours
- * People promoting S2S suggest that bare skin contact is necessary to release sensorial stimuli (touch, warmth, odour) and this can occur in any position



Look at the puppies in picture B. See how their faces lie on top of the mother in S2S contact but their tummies and hind legs hug the ground. The idea that bare skin-on-skin contact is used by other mammals appears somewhat flawed. Animals that feed on their fronts such as puppies, kittens, mice, and hamsters, look like they use gravity positively and self attach in a way similar to human babies during BN (See photo C)



BN keeps mothers and babies comfortable and together, in close frontal body contact in as much S2S as desired. In that way, the mother's body remains the natural habitat providing continuity from womb to world. In conditions where mothers and babies are lightly dressed, if babies are not swaddled, there is still ample opportunity for intimate tactile and sensory stimulation.

