

PROJECT FACT SHEET

The Benefits of Skin-to-Skin contact for Mothers and the Early Mother/Infant Relationship

Investigator: Ann Bigelow
Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
St. Francis Xavier University



While previous studies have shown that skin contact is beneficial for infants, Dr. Ann Bigelow has discovered there are additional benefits to skin-to-skin contact for breastfeeding success rates and the mother-infant relationship.

There is, new research from Nova Scotia indicates, nothing quite like a mother's touch.

Ann Bigelow, a professor of psychology at St. Francis Xavier University, in collaboration with health professionals throughout the province, discovered there are several benefits to early mother/infant skin-to-skin contact. Her research, which took place over three months with mothers and infants from two Nova Scotia hospitals, found that mothers who maintained longer periods of skin-to-skin contact experienced less postpartum depression in the infants' first few weeks of life and were more sensitive to their infants during feeding.

Infants who experienced longer periods of skin-to-skin contact also became socialized more easily—being able to maintain the “quiet alert” state (where infants intently focus on what they hear and see) for longer periods of time. As well, skin-to-skin contact improved infants' sensitivity to their mothers.

“Ultimately,” notes Dr. Bigelow, “increased skin-to-skin contact was found to improve the relationships between mothers and children. Our community benefits from more positive child outcomes and the better parenting skills that grow from a better relationship.”

Mothers from Dr. Bigelow's study who chose to breastfeed also found that skin-to-skin contact helped them maintain their choice to exclusively breastfeed.

“By encouraging new mothers to provide this type of contact with their infants, health-care personnel can enhance the well-being of mothers and infants,” says Dr. Bigelow.

- 30 -

Contact information:
Ann Bigelow
Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
St. Francis Xavier University
Phone: 902. 867. 3900
abigelow@stfx.ca