

Won't I Spoil My Baby?

New parents often question whether it is okay to hold their babies frequently in the early weeks and months. Won't holding a baby cause a baby to want to be held all the time? Isn't it better for babies to learn to comfort themselves? If you hold your baby, will you spoil your baby?

Unfortunately, parents in earlier generations were led to believe that holding a baby was "wrong." However, **this popular belief was not based upon sound research or an accurate understanding of human needs and human development.**

Today we know that **human babies actually need human contact in order to finish developing.** Unlike other mammals, human babies are born with an immature brain and undergo rapid development in the first year of life. Human milk has components which promote optimal brain development. But **skin to skin contact**, which comes naturally with breastfeeding, **is equally important** in developing the centers of the brain that impact relationships and socialization.

Many parents report that their infants are most content when they are being held. The reality is that infants want to survive. They want to be held because they feel safe. Their heart rate regulates and their oxygen levels normalize. They are not thinking "I want to be spoiled". **They are simply doing what comes naturally for them.**

So how do parents meet the needs of their infants to grow and develop in the midst of out dated beliefs that holding babies is harmful?

In the first several months, **hold your baby as much as possible.** When possible, hold your baby skin to skin and touch your baby. You may find that your baby cries very little and quiets easily. Encourage other family members to also hold your baby.

Consider learning how to use a baby sling. Your baby will benefit from being close and you will benefit from having free hands! Find a sling that is comfortable and practice using it. Put your baby in a car seat when you are driving in the car.

The American Academy of Pediatrics "Safe Sleep Guidelines" recommend that in **the early months your baby sleep in your room.** A co-sleeper (which attaches to the side of your bed) or a bassinet by the side of your bed will allow you to feed your baby without leaving your bedroom. Infants who sleep in close proximity to their mothers regulate their breathing patterns better and decrease their risk of SIDS.

If your baby is early, even by a week or so, frequent holding may help your baby to feed better and adapt to life outside the uterus. Wear your baby in a sling as much as possible, especially until your baby is past his or her due date.

Know that your baby will soon be crawling and walking and running! Their first months are crucial for them to feel safe and secure. Enjoy this time when they want to be held. **It will pass all too soon.**

Adapted from Milkworks