

Together Early and Often

Mother and baby need to be together early and often to establish a satisfying relationship and an adequate milk supply.

Nadine has written about her mothering beliefs to give to her daughter, Elora when, in the years ahead, Elora first becomes pregnant.

Dear Elora,

*I looked at you, I touched you, I smelt you. How perfect; what a miracle; **you**.*

Babies need their mothers. Just as strongly mothers need their babies. I remember sending you off to the nursery for my well-earned rest. What a complete joke! Every time a baby cried I would ask a passing nurse, 'Is that mine?' I lay wondering, 'Is she alright?' 'Will they give me back the right baby?' After an hour or so of lying wide awake and being totally uneasy I asked to have you back with me. Peace. I needed you – you were mine!

Bonding is a strange and amazing thing. For some women this happens instantly, for others it takes a while. But one obvious thing seems true – you can't bond with something that isn't there. The more time you spend with adult friends the better you know them – this is also true for mothers and babies. We need to use all our senses to come to understand and care for each other. This relationship is like no other in its intensity, and is perhaps like no other with regard to the mental, emotional and physical health of both mother and baby.

Early contact for the baby reduces stress. The mother's voice, skin to skin contact and warmth all calm the baby as does that first feed. And for the baby the sooner these things can happen the better – birth must be a fairly frightening experience.

Early contact for the mother reduces stress too. To be able to hold such a beautiful 'prize' after such a lot of work makes it all worthwhile. To see your baby studying you in that first hour as if to imprint you on their brain is like magic. That first feed releases hormones to calm you and to help deliver the placenta.

Over the next six weeks it is important to spend as much time together as possible so that your understanding of your baby's needs are clearer to you. A young baby (pre-six weeks) needs at least eight feeds every 24 hours but frequently they require more. This six weeks is when your body learns to produce milk to satisfy your baby's demands, you learn correct positioning and you establish your relationship with baby. It is at this time that a woman begins to understand that her body is truly remarkable in a new way. However hungry her baby is, if she puts it to the breast as often as requested her body just increases production of milk. And if the baby slows down its demand so the production slows. It is like a dance between a mother's body and a baby's.

Many women say that once they reach the six-week mark both they and the baby settle down, understand each other and life seems less demanding. This six weeks is an important 'season'. As with all things there will be good times and difficult ones during this time – but it passes, sometimes all too soon. Many countries treat this time as a special occasion and a relation or a professional moves into the house to care for the rest of the family and household so that these bonding weeks can be optimised. Mother and baby stay together 24 hours a day, sharing sleep and cue-feeding. I believe this is something our society could learn from.

An important thing I learnt and it took both you and Lucas to teach me was that there is no such thing as a manipulative baby. Many people in our society believe that during this 'bonding season' we need to teach the baby who is boss and fit it into a schedule so it will not end up running the household. What I learnt was that there is no such thing as a spoilt baby, only a secure baby, who knows its every need will be attended to as soon as possible. I also learnt that babies' wants are needs – there is no differentiation. Babies are designed to demand that their needs are satisfied otherwise the human race would have died out hundreds of years ago.

It is common for people to suggest a mother takes time out from her new-born baby for her sake. I believe that if they truly understood this 'season' then, for her sake, they would give a mother time out from societal commitments and housework instead.

*'Tis a season to enjoy,
Mum.*

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