Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth is the natural progression of the birth-breastfeeding continuum and is important to the preservation of the mother-baby dyad. Within moments of birth, in the absence of invasive birthing practices, newborns demonstrate innate feeding behaviours and instinctively seek out and move toward the breast. The journey is one of intense hormonal synergy between mother and baby.

The well-known teaching video *Delivery Self Attachment* has recorded these inborn feeding behaviours. In the immediate post-delivery recovery period, an undisrupted newborn ‘crawls’ to the mother’s breast and self-attaches. This natural and instinctive process can be disrupted by narcotic labour medications and other routine procedures, such as separation, bathing, and weighing.

Matheson’s study found similar behaviours among 10 unmedicated infants, left undisturbed, with skin-to-skin contact immediately post-delivery. The babies’ hands explored and massaged their mothers’ breasts; they made hand-to-mouth and sucking movements and they self-attached at the breast. Increased oxytocin levels in the mother were observed during massage and sucking.

Sensory response

There is a mutual olfactory response between newborns and their mothers. Newborns can smell and exhibit preference for their mother’s scent. In a series of studies, babies were found to consistently prefer and move towards the smell of their mothers’ breasts.

If undisturbed during the immediate post delivery recovery period, newborns ‘crawl’ to the mother’s breast and self attach, their hands exploring and massaging the breast. Sucking and hand touching by babies stimulate oxytocin release.

No need for other feeds

With exclusive breastfeeding, the baby receives nothing other than its mother’s rich colostrum which gradually changes to ensure baby’s immunological and nutritional needs are met. Pre-lacteal feeds interfere with the establishment of breastfeeding. Colostrum helps clear mucus from the baby’s digestive system. It is also packed with immunological protection, energy and nutrients.

Good positioning

A positive breastfeeding relationship starts with good positioning and attachment at the breast:

- Baby’s chin is well against the breast.
- Baby’s mouth is open very wide.
- Baby’s lower lip is turned outward.
- Baby’s nose does not touch the breast.
- Baby will have a good mouthful of breast.
Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC)\(^6\)

Kangaroo Mother Care is a birthing and breastfeeding technique developed in Columbia as an alternative for incubators in resource-poor settings. It involves early and prolonged skin-to-skin contact with mother and her newborn.

- Stabilizes temperature and fosters breastfeeding and mothering
- KMC stabilizes and regularizes heart rate and respiratory rate
- KMC normalizes temperature faster than a radiant warmer
- “Thermal Synchrony” allows the mother’s body to warm a cold infant by two degrees C or cool an overly warm infant by one degree C
- Induces deeper sleep patterns
- Premature babies at three and six months postpartum have better emotional and cognitive regulatory abilities and more efficient arousal
- KMC Babies are twice as likely to breastfeed than incubator babies (82 per cent vs. 45 per cent) and their mothers produce 60 per cent more breastmilk
- Mothers practicing KMC have better sleep and a deeper sense of well-being in that they are ‘doing something’ for their premature baby.

References