

# The First Hour After Birth: A Baby's 9 Instinctive Stages

*The first hours after birth are a developmentally distinct time for a baby and there are well-documented short and long-term physical and psychological advantages when a baby is held skin-to-skin during this time.*

When a baby is in skin-to-skin contact after birth there are nine observable newborn stages, happening in a specific order, that are innate and instinctive for the baby. Within each of these stages, there are a variety of actions the baby may demonstrate.

## **Stage 1: The Birth Cry**

The first stage is the birth cry. This distinctive cry occurs immediately after birth as the baby's lungs expand.

## **Stage 2: Relaxation**

The second stage is the relaxation stage. During the relaxation stage, the newborn exhibits no mouth movements and the hands are relaxed. This stage usually begins when the birth cry has stopped. The baby is skin-to-skin with the mother and covered with a warm, dry towel or blanket.

## **Stage 3: Awakening**

The third stage is the awakening stage. During this stage the newborn exhibits small thrusts of movement in the head and shoulders. This stage usually begins about 3 minutes after birth. The newborn in the awakening stage may exhibit head movements, open his eyes, show some mouth activity and might move his shoulders.

## **Stage 4: Activity**

The fourth stage is the activity stage. During this stage, the newborn begins to make increased mouthing and sucking movements as the rooting reflex becomes more obvious. This stage usually begins about 8 minutes after birth.

## **Stage 5: Rest**

At any point, the baby may rest. The baby may have periods of resting between periods of activity throughout the first hour or so after birth.

## **Stage 6: Crawling**

The sixth stage is the crawling stage. The baby approaches the breast during this stage with short periods of action that result in reaching the breast and nipple. This stage usually begins about 35 minutes after birth.

## **Stage 7: Familiarization**

The seventh stage is called familiarization. During this stage, the newborn becomes acquainted with the mother by licking the nipple and touching and massaging her breast. This stage usually begins around 45 minutes after birth and could last for 20 minutes or more.

**Stage 8: Suckling**

The eighth stage is suckling. During this stage, the newborn takes the nipple, self-attaches and suckles. This early experience of learning to breastfeed usually begins about an hour after birth. If the mother has had analgesia/anesthesia during labor, it may take more time with skin to skin for the baby to complete the stages and begin suckling.

**Stage 9: Sleep**

The final stage is sleep. The baby and sometimes the mother fall into a restful sleep. Babies usually fall asleep about 1½ to 2 hours after birth.

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