

Research shows mothers holding at-risk babies can help with pain management

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Dr. Campbell-Yeo (left) and nursing students.

Dr. Marsha Campbell-Yeo and her team of researchers at Dalhousie's School of Nursing are exploring how maternal-driven interventions can help improve outcomes for at-risk preterm and fullterm infants.

Historically, a parent's role in neonatal intensive care has been minimal. Babies in the [neonatal intensive care](#) unit (NICU) can undergo numerous

painful procedures, sometimes as many as 500 to 1000.

Repeated exposure to these procedures can lead to changes in how babies perceive pain, and how they regulate not just pain but other forms of stress later in life. New emerging literature considers how it can actually change the way the brain develops. This research investigates how skin-to-skin contact from mothers can help babies better manage pain and stress during procedures like needles or an [intravenous injection](#).

The researchers have also found that fathers, unrelated women and even a twin can provide similar pain relieving benefits for an at-risk infant, though the impact isn't as significant as it is with the mother

The findings can lead to a shift in the way NICUs operate, given their predominate focus on technology in the past. Dr. Campbell-Yeo and her team are currently finishing up a systematic review of 18 clinical trials around the world—many done at the IWK Health Centre —supporting the role of mothers in pain management of [newborns](#). They're also starting a new set of clinical trials, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, investigating the long-term impacts of these interventions.

According to Dr. Marsha Campbell-Yeo, assistant professor from the School of Nursing, "We've shown there's tremendous benefits of something as simple as having a mother hold her baby skin-to-skin during a procedure—up to 30 per cent reduction in the short-term [pain response](#) as well as improvements in how the newborn regulates that pain."

Provided by Dalhousie University

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