research highlights

PAEDIATRICS

Advantages for kangaroo kids

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Kangaroo mother care (KMC) for premature and low birth weight (LBW) infants was introduced in Colombia in the 1970s as an alternative to long-term hospital care. A 20-year follow-up study by Nathalie Charpak of Fundación Canguro, Bogotá and colleagues, finds that several of the developmental and behavioural advantages of KMC versus traditional care remain significant into adulthood.

KMC prescribes three elements: early discharge from the neonatal unit, constant parent–child skin-to-skin contact, and exclusive or predominant breastfeeding. The original randomized control trial was conducted with a large cohort between 1993 and 1996 and follow-ups have since demonstrated developmental trajectories at 1 and 10 years as good as or better than those observed following extended neonatal unit care. In the current study, the authors show that, 20 years later, KMC patients with extreme LBW (<1800 g; 37% of original cohort) retained greater grey matter volume in the left caudate, and exhibited better fine motor control and a small IQ advantage among those with transient neurologic status in infancy. The KMC individuals also scored lower on tests of antisocial behaviour, experienced greater familial support and had higher average salaries.

Longitudinal studies are important to assess effectiveness and disentangle the physical and social explicators of multifaceted interventions like KMC.

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