

# The Benefits of Swaddle Bathing with the Turtle Tub

In this feature, Neonatal Intensive Care interviews clinicians and healthcare providers about the actual application of specific products and therapies. This interview is with Linda M. Roche, BSN, RNC-NIC, Clinical Coordinator, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, UMass Memorial Medical Center.

**Neonatal Intensive Care:** How long have you been working in the NICU?

**Linda M. Roche:** I have been a nurse in the NICU my entire career over 25 years from my early years as a nursing assistant. I have worked in many institutions — mainly in Level III NICUs as well as newborn nursery, pediatric and cardiac ICUs — across the country from Massachusetts to Hawaii.

**NIC:** How did you bathe the infants prior to learning about swaddle bathing with the TurtleTub?

**LR:** The sponge bath in the baby's isolette or crib was the first method of bathing that I learned from my preceptor or a bath in a small hospital basin.

**NIC:** Who did the bathing?

**LR:** The nurse typically performed the bath as part of her night shift routine of bathing, weighing and changing the linens.

**NIC:** How did the baby respond to your previous way of bathing?

**LR:** Generally, it was stressful experience for the baby and not well tolerated. Babies would often cry, squirm in response to being cold and wet. The nurse often would do it quickly as it was an unpleasant experience which burned many calories and depleted baby's energy.

**NIC:** Why did you decide to change your bathing method?

**LR:** I attended a conference my first few years as a nurse and spoke with a developmental care specialist. She introduced me to the technique of swaddled bathing and explained the rationale behind it. It made sense to me. Everything we do as nurses has an effect on the baby and it is crucial to look at things from the baby's perspective. Developmentally supportive care focuses on observing the baby's cues and responding in a way that promote stability. I incorporated this new idea into my practice at the bedside and observed a remarkable difference in the way the baby was able to be calm and content. As nurses we thrive on learning new ways of doing things that improve the care we provide our babies. It is always evolving as we learn from each other and share ideas.

**NIC:** What were you trying to accomplish by changing bathing methods?

**LR:** My hope was to improve the baby's experience and turn bathing into a pleasant and positive experience. We are



Photo submitted.

discovering that these early experience both positive and negative directly affect baby's brain development. What we do now matters. As caregivers, we recognize the impact we have on these fragile babies long after they leave the NICU. It was also important to decrease the calories burned to foster growth and development. Baby's often have little reserve after stressful events which leave them little energy to devote to other things such as successful breastfeeding. We also wanted to role model for parents and demonstrate ways to be involved in hands-on care.

“The Developmental Care Team is committed to providing individualized developmentally supportive care to all infants in our NICU with the understanding that the care we provide greatly impacts the ability of the infant to achieve his or her developmental potential. Developmentally supportive care impacts brain development and has lifelong implications. How we interact with infants in large part impacts how they will develop and who they will become. The bedside nurse has a unique role in providing life-saving medical care while simultaneously supporting and protecting quality of life.” The team supports and encourages the swaddled bathing technique.

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If you would like to participate in this feature, as a company or healthcare provider, please contact Steve Goldstein at [s.gold4@verizon.net](mailto:s.gold4@verizon.net).

**NIC:** And did swaddle bathing with the TurtleTub accomplish those goals?

**LR:** This technique certainly achieves the goals.

**NIC:** How did the babies respond to bathing in the TurtleTub?

**LR:** The babies loved it. It was pleasant and positive. They were either in a quiet and alert state, dozing or in a light sleep. Their bodies were relaxed and they were calm and content. The wrapping offers the containment and the boundaries that they prefer. Babies that are experiencing withdrawal from opioids are often irritable, difficult to console and hypertonic. This technique is so beneficial in helping them soothe and gives them a sense of security. One Dad said “ This is amazing! No tears. He slept through the whole thing!”

**NIC:** What surprised you the most about swaddle bathing with the TurtleTub?

**LR:** It is such a simple technique but highly effective. It is wonderful tool that provides meaningful touch. Meaningful touch is important for all babies no matter what their gestational age. So much of the touch that is done in the NICU is uncomfortable and even painful so it is important that each baby receives meaningful, positive touch from his or her parents and staff as often as possible. The NICU environment increases the risk of developmental delays in cognition, hearing and language development so techniques that support and encourage proper development are important.

**NIC:** Have parents been able to bathe their infants with the TurtleTub? If so, what has been their response?

**LR:** Yes. We support family-centered care and encourage parents to be involved in all aspects of their babies care. We have a conversation with our parents about this and hand out an information sheet on how to perform a swaddle bath and encourage them to watch the video. Nurses are there to assist them the first time. Parents are so pleased to be able to bathe their baby without all the stress of a traditional bath causes. Parents say that they are more confident in handling their baby and now look forward to bath time. They feel more bonded and attached as they get to know their unique baby. They are pleased to have the opportunity to not only clean the baby but comfort them as well. It gives them a sense of pride as they share special time together to interact and make memories.

**NIC:** How did the rest of the staff feel about changing bathing practices?

**LR:** An educator from the company came to my unit and gave in-services to the staff and provided resources we needed to successfully launch the program. Staff have warmed up to the idea once they see the positive effect it has on the baby and family. It takes time to change our practice and incorporate new ideas into daily routines. As Nurses we are vigilant and mindful about improving the care we provide each family.

**NIC:** Would you recommend other hospitals to swaddle bathe with the TurtleTub? If so, why?

**LR:** Definitely. The technique is effective and the TurtleTub swaddle bath system is wonderful.