

Safe Sleeping

THE LATEST GUIDANCE FOR SAFE SLEEPING

Sadly, some babies die suddenly and unexpectedly during their sleep for no explainable reason. This is known as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or cot-death. Parents of multiples need to be particularly vigilant as multiple birth babies are more likely to be premature or low birth weight and are therefore at a higher risk of SIDS.

What can you do to reduce the risk of SIDS?

Babies should be placed to sleep on their backs. Placing babies on their backs to sleep keeps their airways clear, prevents them from overheating, and ensures they don't re-breathe their exhaled carbon dioxide.

Parents should avoid smoking during pregnancy and to keep all babies smoke-free after birth. Exposure to smoking dramatically increases the risk of SIDS. Other advice is to keep babies' heads uncovered so they can't overheat as SIDS is associated with overheating. Always un-wrap babies and remove hats when you go from a cold to a warm place such as into a shop or on a bus, especially if the babies are sleeping.

At night babies should sleep in the feet to foot position, with their feet at the bottom of their cot or crib as this method is designed to ensure that babies can't wriggle down under their covers and get their heads covered with bedding. Make sure the cot is free from toys, pillows and loose bedding.

It is currently advised that babies sleep in the same room as their parents for the first six months.

Together or apart?

This is a question that many parents of multiples ask – can my babies sleep in

the same cot? Yes, your babies can sleep in the same cot, in fact many parents find that putting their babies to sleep in the same bed works well for the first few weeks or months, after all the babies are used to being together throughout pregnancy.

Having the babies in one cot can also be a logical solution for parents that don't have the space for more than one cot in a room.

Safety tip: We do not recommend that you co-bed in a Moses basket due to the limited space.

How do I place my babies to sleep in the same cot?

When your babies are small they can be placed side by side on their backs at the bottom of the cot in the feet to foot position.



Another option is to sleep them at either end of the cot on their backs, with their heads in the middle.

If you do wish to co-bed your multiples, it might be worth purchasing a cot bed which is bigger than a normal cot, and will therefore provide more space for your babies and may allow you to co-bed for longer.



Safety tip: In order to give babies some more space parents sometimes place their babies on their backs side by side across the cot. If you decide to do this you should place your babies in sleeping bags (check weight to ensure sleeping bags are suitable) rather than blankets. It's not possible to tightly tuck in the covers at the sides when the babies are asleep in this position therefore leaving the bedding loose with the potential to be pulled over the babies' heads.

Can my triplets sleep in the same bed?

For triplets or higher order multiples, co-bedding all babies using the same cot while they are still small enough to fit is an efficient use of space, and would reduce SIDS risk if the babies are sleeping in their parents' room. However no research has specifically examined sleeping arrangements for triplets. If 3 babies are sleeping together parents should be mindful of any size discrepancies and take note of whether the smallest gets crowded by the others if placed in between them. As triplets and HOMs tend to be relatively small at birth there is some anecdotal evidence that co-bedding them in the same cot helps them to maintain a stable temperature, conserve heat, and grow faster.

What about in neonatal care? Should my multiples be in the same incubator?

There is insufficient research to give a conclusive view on co-bedding in a neonatal unit. The research that has been done suggests that premature babies might stabilize more quickly in contact with their sibling(s), lose less heat, grow faster and potentially feel less pain when undergoing a treatment or examination but more studies are required to have greater certainty about these potential benefits. If one baby has an infection that another might catch babies have to be separated for infection control, but some Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) and Special Care Baby Units (SCBUs), especially those committed to the principles of developmental care, will try to place multiples in the same cot in the hospital.

Even when your babies are not co-bedded in hospital, you should be able to introduce co-bedding at home

fairly easily once they come home, in fact many parents feel that their babies prefer to be together in the early months of life.

Are they likely to get too hot if they are side by side – can they overheat one another? Or could one even suffocate the other?

Unless one baby has a fever and the other one doesn't there is no reason why two babies sleeping next to each other should overheat. When babies come home from the very warm environment of the hospital to a cooler home bedroom, putting the babies together for sleep can help them to conserve body heat.

When it comes to suffocation, the critical situation would be if one baby were substantially smaller than the other and did not have the strength to move a sibling who got too close

Will my babies disrupt each other if they sleep in the same cot?

Sleeping twins together doesn't affect sleep duration, but there does seem to be greater synchrony between babies who are co-bedded.

Safety tip: Tamba does not recommend the use of cot dividers as these are a potential suffocation hazards for the babies

What if I want to keep my babies in separate beds?

That's fine too. Parents should be mindful of the additional space they'll require. It's recommended that babies spend the first 6 months in their parents' bedroom so you would need to make sure you're able to fit two cots into your bedroom.

Should my babies sleep in the same bed as us?

Sharing a bed with your babies is not recommended if you are excessively tired, are a smoker or smoked during pregnancy, or have consumed alcohol or drugs (including over the counter drugs which can make you drowsy). Looking after multiples in the early days is hard work, it is highly likely that you will be sleep deprived and therefore you're likely to be extremely tired. It is also possible that your babies may be premature or of low birth weights. Premature or small babies' normal physiological defence mechanisms are less well developed, and they could therefore be less well equipped to cope with challenges that term babies can cope with (such as having their face covered by bedding).

The safest place for your babies to sleep is in a cot in your room, if however, your babies were born at or close to term or were premature and have now caught up you may decide to co-sleep (bed-share). If this is the case, it is important to ensure that the babies have sufficient space, are not near pillows, are not overdressed, that you sleep facing them (don't turn your back to them) and that none of the factors listed above are of relevance.

For further information:

Take a look at Dr Helen Ball's research on co-bedding

Website: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/sleep.lab/projects/twins/>

<https://www.isisonline.org.uk/twins/>