

Sharing a bed with your baby

A guide for breastfeeding mothers



UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative
with the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths



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Breastfeeding is best for your baby's health and your own health. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the health benefits for you both.

It is recommended that your baby shares a room with you for at least the first 6 months, as this helps with breastfeeding and protects babies against cot death.

Bringing your baby into bed with you means that you can breastfeed in comfort. This may be why mothers who share a bed with their baby tend to breastfeed for longer than those who don't.

As it is easy to fall asleep while breastfeeding, especially when lying down, there are some important points to consider before taking your baby into bed with you.

In particular, adult beds are not designed with infant safety in mind. Babies can die if they get trapped or wedged in the bed or if a parent lies on them. So the *safest* place for a baby to sleep is in a cot by your bed.

However, you can reduce the risk of accidents and, because bed sharing helps with breastfeeding, you may find this leaflet useful.

Important - when not to sleep with your baby

Smoking increases the risk of cot death. You should make sure that you don't fall asleep with your baby in your bed if you (or any other person in the bed) are a smoker, even if you never smoke in bed.

Never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.

Falling asleep with your baby is also dangerous if you (or any other person in the bed) might find it hard to respond to the baby. For example if you:

- have drunk alcohol
- have taken any drug (legal or illegal) which could make you extra sleepy
- have any illness or condition which affects your awareness of your baby
- are otherwise unusually tired to a point where you would find it difficult to respond to your baby.

It also may be safest not to bed share in the early months if your baby was born preterm, was small at birth or if he has a high temperature.

Reduce the risk of accidents and overheating

Sofas are very dangerous for babies as they can become trapped down the sides or in the cushions. Never lie down or fall asleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.

Adult beds are not designed for babies. To prevent your baby overheating, suffocating or becoming trapped:

- The mattress must be firm and flat - waterbeds, bean bags and sagging mattresses are not suitable;
- Make sure that your baby can't fall out of bed or get stuck between the mattress and the wall;
- The room must not be too hot (16-18°C is ideal);
- Your baby should not be overdressed - he should not wear any more clothes than you would wear in bed yourself;
- The covers must not overheat the baby or cover the baby's head;
- Your baby must not be left alone *in* or *on* the bed as even very young babies can wriggle into dangerous positions;
- Your partner should know if your baby is in the bed;
- If an older child is also sharing your bed, you or your partner should sleep between the child and the baby;
- Pets should not share a bed with your baby

If you have any questions, your midwife or health visitor will be able to advise you.

Your sleeping position

If you are bed sharing, it is important to make sure that your baby cannot go under the covers or into the pillow.

Most mothers who are breastfeeding automatically sleep facing their baby with their body in a position which protects the baby by stopping him moving up or down the bed (see picture).

Your baby will usually lie on his side to



breastfeed. When not actually feeding, he should be put on his back to sleep, never on his front or side.

If you are bottle feeding the safest place for your baby to sleep is in a cot by your bed.

UNICEF and the Baby Friendly Initiative

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is working globally to help every child reach his or her full potential. We work in more than 150 countries, supporting programmes to provide children with:

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- safe water and sanitation
- education

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UNICEF UK's Baby Friendly Initiative works with hospitals, health centres and GP surgeries, to help them ensure that pregnant women and new mothers get the support they need to breastfeed successfully. We encourage the health services to improve the care they provide in line with international best practice standards. Those that do so can apply for the prestigious 'Baby Friendly' award from UNICEF and the World Health Organisation.

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths is one of the UK's leading baby charities working to prevent sudden infant deaths and promote baby health. FSID funds research, promotes health advice to parents and professionals and supports bereaved families.

More information on FSID and the health advice to protect babies from cot deaths and accidents can be seen at www.sids.org.uk/fsid/ or call the Helpline on 0870 787 0554. To make a donation to help fund FSID's lifesaving work please call 020 7222 8003.

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The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative and the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths have issued this leaflet together in order to give parents clear information about both the benefits of bed sharing and the situations in which bed sharing is unsafe.

www.babyfriendly.org.uk

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the Baby Friendly Initiative