

Sharing a bed with your baby



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



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Keeping your baby close to you helps you get to know your baby and to recognise when he is hungry and wanting to feed. In hospital, you are encouraged to have your baby with you by your bed at all times. When you go home it is recommended that your baby shares a room with you, particularly at night, for at least the first 6 months, as this helps protect babies against cot death.

If you are breastfeeding, you may find it helps if your baby shares your bed at night. This can make breastfeeding easier because your baby can feed whenever he wants without disturbing you too much. It also helps to calm your baby if he is unsettled, and many babies sleep better when they are close to their mother. However, to ensure safety, there are a few points to consider before you think about having your baby in bed with you. The most important points are listed in the box on the right.

There are also other things you need to be aware of if you are bed-sharing:

- The mattress should be firm, flat and clean.
- Make sure your baby does not get too warm. The best room temperature for a baby is 16-18°C.
- If you are ill or have any condition which might make it difficult to respond to your baby, it might be sensible not to sleep together.

Important

You should not share a bed with a baby if you (or any other person in the bed):

- **are a smoker** (no matter where or when you smoke)



- **have drunk alcohol**
- **have taken any drug or medication** which could make you extra sleepy
- **are otherwise unusually tired** to a point where you would find it difficult to respond to your baby because this will increase the risk of cot death.

Never sleep with your baby on a sofa as that is very dangerous. It's also unsafe to let your baby sleep alone in an adult bed or to let him sleep on a waterbed, bean bag or a sagging mattress.

- It is best to use sheets and blankets rather than duvets or quilts.
- Do not overdress your baby or cover his head: he should not wear any more layers than you would wear yourself. Your baby should not wear a baby sleeping bag as well as being under your covers. It's probably best not to swaddle your baby so he doesn't get too warm. (Many mothers find that skin-to-skin contact with their babies helps with breastfeeding and to settle the baby.)

You also need to think about protecting your baby against accidents:

- Make sure that your baby cannot fall out of bed or get stuck between the mattress and the wall.
- If you don't go to bed at the same time, make sure your partner knows your baby is in the bed.
- If an older child is also sharing your bed, it's best you or your partner sleeps between the child and the baby.
- Don't let pets share a bed with your baby.
- If you are not breastfeeding your baby, it's probably safest to put your baby back in his cot before you go to sleep. This is because research may suggest that bottle feeding mothers do not always sleep facing their baby (see the box on the right).

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

Most mothers who are breast-feeding automatically sleep facing their baby with their body in a position which stops the baby from going under the covers or into the pillow (see picture). This is ideal and will make breast-feeding easier.



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. It is also important to make sure that he cannot go under the covers or into the pillow.

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:

- improved health and nutrition
- safe water and sanitation
- education

UNICEF also helps children who need special protection, such as child labourers and victims of war.



The Baby Friendly Initiative is a global programme of UNICEF and the World Health Organisation which works with the health services to improve practice in the support of breastfeeding. In the UK, the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative is commissioned by various parts of the health service to provide advice, support, training, networking, assessment and accreditation.

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supporting breastfeeding and
the Baby Friendly Initiative

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.