



**Bed-sharing
and your baby:**

the facts

Settling your baby at night

Many new parents find it hard to care for a new baby during the night. There may be times when your baby is still unsettled after feeds. Skin-to-skin contact between you and your baby can help to settle your baby. If you are breastfeeding, offering your baby your breast again can help too, even if your baby has just fed.

If you have had a very sleepless night, try to rest as much as you can the next day. Any housework or visitors can wait.

If your baby cries for long periods, she may be unwell. Seek medical advice.

Breastfeeding and sharing a bed with your baby

Based on quality scientific research, the *SIDS and Kids* organisation includes 'breastfeed baby' as one of their six safe sleeping messages. This is because breastfeeding helps to protect a baby from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Many parents find it easier to breastfeed at night while sharing a bed with their baby. Mothers who share a bed with their baby tend to breastfeed for longer, both exclusively and in total length.

When sharing a bed with her baby, a breastfeeding mother tends to form a protective 'C' shape around her baby (see illustration) and tends to respond very well to her baby's needs. This position helps to make breastfeeding easier and helps to stop a baby from going under the covers or into the pillow. When breastfeeding next to his mother, the baby will usually be lying on his side. When he is not feeding, he should be placed on his back to sleep.

If you are unable to provide a safe sleeping environment for your baby in your bed, having your baby sleep in a cot in the same room is a safer alternative.

Sharing a bed with your baby

SIDS and Kids Australia recommends that babies sleep in their own safe sleeping environment next to the parental bed for the first 6–12 months of life to help prevent infant deaths.

Many parents find that bringing their baby into their bed helps them to care for their baby at night. Even when parents, prior to their baby's birth, do not intend to sleep with their baby, it is still common for parents to do so, at least at some point overnight. One Australian study found that about 80% of babies spent some time sharing the parental bed in the first 6 months of life. So, it is very important to think about the information in this leaflet to help keep your baby safe and to reduce the risk of sudden infant death.

It is not safe to share a bed with your baby:

- If you or your partner:
 - are a smoker or if the mother smoked during pregnancy (no matter how often, what, where or when you smoked),
 - have consumed any alcohol or taken illegal or sleep-inducing drugs (Blair PS, 2013, pers comm 26 September),
 - are unusually tired, to a point where you would find it hard to respond to your baby.
- In the early months, if your baby was born very small or premature.
- If your baby is formula-fed, it may be safer for your baby to sleep in a cot in your room.

In addition:

- Don't sleep with your baby on a sofa, waterbed, armchair, bean bag etc.
- Don't let your baby sleep alone in a bed, on a sofa, bean bag etc.
- Don't let other children sleep next to your baby.
- Don't let pets share a bed with your baby, or leave a baby alone in a room that pets can get to.

If sharing a bed with your baby:

- Put your baby on his back to sleep, never on his front or side.
- Make sure your baby cannot fall out of bed or get stuck between the mattress and a wall or furniture.
- Make sure the bedclothes or bedding cannot cover your baby's face.
- Don't overdress your baby or cover his head.
- Your baby should not wear a sleeping bag as well as being under the covers.
- Don't swaddle your baby.
- Don't use an electric blanket on a bed where your baby is sleeping.
- Whenever possible, use natural fibres that allow for better air flow.
- The mattress should be firm, flat, clean, and not smell of chemicals. Do not dry-clean bedding.
- Make sure your partner knows that your baby is in the bed.



References

- Baddock SA, Galland BC, Taylor BJ, Bolton DPG 2007, Sleep arrangements and behavior of bed-sharing families in the home setting. *Pediatrics* 119(1): e200–e207.
- Ball HL, Hooker E, Kelly PJ 2000, Parent-infant co-sleeping: Fathers' roles and perspectives. *Inf Child Dev* 9: 67–74.
- Ball H L 2002, Reasons to bed-share: why parents sleep with their infants. *J Reproduct Infant Psychol* 20 (4): 207–222.
- Ball HL 2003, Breastfeeding, bed sharing and infant sleep. *Birth* 30(3): 181–188.
- Blair PS, Fleming PJ, Smith IJ, Ward Platt M, Young J, Nadin P, Berry PJ, Golding J, CESDI SUDI Research Group 1999, Babies sleeping with parents: case-control study of factors influencing the risk of the sudden infant death syndrome. *BMJ* 319: 1457–1461.
- Blair PS, Heron J, Fleming PH 2010, Relationship between bed sharing and breastfeeding: longitudinal, population-based analysis. *Pediatrics* 126(5): e1119–e1126.
- Byard RW, Beal S, Blackbourne B, Nadeau JM, Krous HDF 2001, Specific dangers associated with infants sleeping on sofas. *J Paediatr Child Health* 37: 476–478.
- Carpenter RG, Irgens LM, Blair PS, England PD, Fleming P, Huber J, Jorch G, Schreuder P 2004, Sudden unexplained infant death in 20 regions in Europe: case control study. *Lancet* 363: 185–191.
- Hauck FR, Thompson JM, Tanabe KO, Moon RY, Vennemann MM, 2011, Breastfeeding and reduced risk of sudden infant death syndrome: a meta-analysis. *Pediatrics* 128(1):103–110.
- McCoy RC, Hunt CE, Lesko SM, Vezina R, Corwin MJ, Willinger M, Hoffman HJ, Mitchell AA 2004, Frequency of bed sharing and its relationship to breastfeeding. *Dev Behav Pediatr* 25(3): 141–144.
- McKenna JJ, McDade T 2005, Why babies should never sleep alone: a review of the co-sleeping controversy in relation to SIDS, bedsharing and breast feeding *Paediatr Respi Rev* 6(2): 134–152.
- McKenna J 2012, *Safe Cosleeping Guidelines*. URL: www.cosleeping.nd.edu/safe-co-sleeping-guidelines/ Accessed 5/3/12.
- Rigda RS, McMillen IC, Buckley P 2000, Bed sharing patterns in a cohort of Australian infants during the first six months after birth. *J Paediatr Child Health* 36: 117–121.
- Sragg R, Mitchell EA, Taylor BJ, Stewart AW, Ford RPK, Thompson JMD, Allen EM, Becroft DMO on behalf of the New Zealand Cot Death Study Group 1993, Bed sharing, smoking, and alcohol in the sudden infant death syndrome. *BMJ* 307: 1312–1318.

SIDS and Kids and Queensland Health 2012, *Safe Sleeping Brochure*. URL: http://sidsandkids.org/wp-content/uploads/SafeSleeping_Brochure.pdf Accessed 1/10/12.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative 2004, *Babies Sharing Their Mother's Bed While In Hospital A Sample Policy* URL: <http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/Guidance-for-Health-Professionals/Writing-policies-and-guidelines/Sample-bedsharing-policy/> Accessed 1/10/12.

UNICEF UK 2011, *Caring For Your Baby at Night* (Leaflet) URL: <http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/Resources-for-parents/Caring-for-your-baby-at-night/> Accessed 1/10/12.

Vennemann MM, Hense HW, Bajanowski T, Blair PS, Complojer C, Moon RY et al 2012, Bed sharing and the risk of sudden infant death syndrome: can we resolve the debate? *J Pediatr* 160(1): 44–48.e2.

Young J 1998, Bed-sharing with babies: the facts. *RCM Midwives Journal* 1(11): 338–341.

Young J 1999, *Night-time Behaviour and Interactions Between Mothers and Their Infants of Low Risk for SIDS: A Longitudinal Study of Room-sharing and Bed sharing*, PhD thesis: Institute of Child Health, University of Bristol.

Contacts

To obtain copies contact:

Mothers Direct
Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA)

Tel: 03 9885 0855

Fax: 03 9886 9033

Email: orders@mothersdirect.com.au

Website: www.mothersdirect.com.au

For further information contact:

Breastfeeding Information and Research

Tel: 03 9885 0855

Email: bir@breastfeeding.asn.au

Website: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Acknowledgements

ABA would like to acknowledge Dr Pete Blair, BSc(Hons), MSc(Leic), PhD(Bristol) and the Infant Sleep Information Source (ISIS) (www.isisonline.org.uk) for their contribution to making this leaflet.

Cover photograph by Brad Marsellos.



Breastfeeding Helpline
1800 mum 2 mum

1800 686 268

The Breastfeeding Helpline is supported by funding from the Australian Government.

© Australian Breastfeeding Association January 2014