

From: Sharing a bed with your baby - UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative with the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths

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 the 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.

There are also other things you need to be aware of if you are bedsharing:

- 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.
- 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 their head: they 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.)

Most mothers who are breastfeeding automatically sleep facing their baby with their body in a position which stops the baby from going under the covers or into the pillow. This is ideal and will make breastfeeding easier. Your baby will usually lie on his side to breastfeed. When not actually feeding, they should be put on their back to sleep, never on their front or side. It is also important to make sure that your baby cannot go under the covers or into the pillow. 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 crib before you go to sleep. This is because research may suggest that bottle feeding mothers do not always sleep facing their baby

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 or otherwise unusually tired to a point where you would find it difficult to respond to your baby because this will increase the risk of SIDS.