

Bed sharing



Don't sleep in the same bed as your baby if you smoke, drink or take drugs

We recognise that bed sharing can sometimes be a sensitive issue for parents, and The Lullaby Trust wants to make sure there is one key message for parents on bed sharing. The key message that everyone agrees upon is that the safest place for a baby to sleep is in a cot or a crib, in the same room as their parents or carers. You should not share a bed with your baby if you or your partner smoke, have consumed any alcohol, medication or drugs, or if your baby was born at a low birth weight or prematurely.

It is especially dangerous to fall asleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair. Not just parents but any adult, should never sleep with a baby on a sofa

Never sleep on a sofa or in an armchair with your baby. This is one of the most high risk sleep situations for your baby

Bringing your baby into bed with you to be comforted or fed can be a bonding experience and this is safe to do provided you place your baby back in their cot or Moses basket to sleep. Bed sharing means that the baby shares the same adult bed for most of the night, while both the adult and the baby are asleep, and this can be unsafe under some circumstances



When not to bed share

There are some circumstances where everyone agrees the chance of SIDS is increased and it is particularly dangerous to bed share.

You should never share a bed with your baby if:

Either you or your partner smokes (even if you do not smoke in the bedroom)

Either you or your partner has drunk alcohol or taken drugs (including any medication that may make you drowsy) Bed sharing is dangerous if your baby was premature (born before 37 weeks) or had a low birth-weight (less than 2.5 kg or 5 ½ lbs), even if you don't smoke, drink or take drugs. Bed sharing with a baby of low birth weight or a premature baby is strongly linked to an increased chance of SIDS. You should also avoid bedsharing when you are particularly overtired. This may increase the chance of SIDS and possibly accidents as well.



If you bed share

Parents may choose to bed share with their baby for various reasons. If this is your choice, make sure that you have read the advice above on when never to bed share so you can make an informed decision. If you choose to bed share, there are a few points that could help make bed sharing safer.

Keep your baby away from adult bedding:

A high proportion of infants who die as a result of SIDS are found with their head covered by loose bedding. Do not use pillows or duvets and keep sheets and blankets clear of the baby's head. There should be no items in the bed with you that could obstruct your baby's breathing or cause them to overheat

Be aware of possible accidents:

Make sure your baby cannot fall out of bed or get trapped between the bed or mattress and the wall. Never leave them alone in an adult bed

Young babies:

It is also important to be aware that there may still be an increased risk of bed sharing with a young baby (under 3 months) when none of the above risk factors are present in your household. A recent overview of five large studies found a five-fold increase for breastfed babies, of non-smoking parents, who share a bed with either one or both of their parents

You must be especially careful that you are not in a position where you and your baby could both fall asleep in an armchair or on the sofa together.

The risk is not just for accidents or suffocation, but for SIDS deaths as well. This is one of the most high risk sleep situations for your baby

Frequently asked questions



I am worried I might fall asleep in bed while I breastfeed my baby at night, is this ok?

Breastfeeding reduces the chance of SIDS, so we would always try and help you work out a way to continue breastfeeding in the safest way possible. If you feel you might fall asleep because you are lying down, it might be worth trying to feed in a sitting position or step outside of bed to breastfeed. Make sure you know the advice on when never to bed share so you know when to take particular care. However, it is really important that you do not accidentally fall asleep with your baby on a sofa. If you think you might fall asleep, put the baby down in a safe place to sleep. If you are breastfeeding, have your partner stay up with you, breastfeed in a different position where you are confident you might not fall asleep, or feed the baby somewhere else

My baby won't settle in their cot and only sleeps well in our bed, help!

Unfortunately there is no easy fix to a baby's sleeping habits – but keep persevering! Babies can get used to different sleeping places but it can take a while. Try moving their cot close to your bed so you can still put your hand on them if needed and they know you are close by. Keep going!

Do I need to bed share to breastfeed successfully?

There is no evidence to say that you need to bed share to breastfeed. For night feeds it is easy to bring your baby into bed to feed or settle, but they are safest then going back into their cot to sleep

Do you advise against bed sharing?

We do not tell parents to never bed share. However, as a charity committed to reducing the number of babies dying from SIDS, we try to give parents the best advice we can, so they know the things they should never do, and what are the safest ways to look after their baby so they can make informed choices. The Lullaby Trust and the NHS, and many professional and parenting organisations all agree that the safest place for a baby to sleep is in their own cot or Moses basket in their parents' bedroom until they are at least six months old

Research corner

Studies have shown that sharing a sofa or armchair is associated with an extremely high risk of SIDS and babies can become trapped between the parent and the back of the sofa or armchair. Bed sharing with an infant can also increase the risk of SIDS. The risk of bedsharing is particularly increased in families where either parent is a smoker, whether or not they smoke in the bedroom. For example, one evidence review found that the risk of SIDS when bed sharing was over 6 times greater in smokers than in non-smokers. The risk of SIDS has also been found to be higher where the bed sharer has used alcohol or drugs, or is overtired. Premature and low birth weight babies are at a particularly increased risk from bed sharing, whether or not the parents smoke. There is evidence to show, however, that when infants share the same room but not the same bed as their parents, the risk of SIDS is decreased

Our advice

As research is still emerging, our core safety message is always: Place your baby to sleep in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as you for the first 6 months, even during the day. Babies rely on the comfort of being close to their parents or carers, and need this during the night as well as during the day. Sharing a room with your baby enables you to respond to early cues such as murmuring or restlessness in your baby, without them starting to cry or becoming distressed.

Remember

Sleeping in the same room as your baby has also been shown to lower the chance of SIDS. The chance of SIDS is lower when babies sleep in the same room as their parents, but do not share the same bed with them

More information

See UNICEF's 'Caring for your baby at night' leaflet by visiting www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/Resources-for-parents/Caring-for-your-baby-at-night/