

Sleep problems - more than one baby

It can be a challenge to get just one baby to sleep. When there is more than one, babies may take turns in crying and playing all night long. This can quickly exhaust their parents. Getting babies to sleep at night is a common problem for a parent of twins or HOMs (higher order multiples – triplets, quads or more).

Multiple births and sleep challenges

Compared to a single baby, twins or HOMs present a few extra challenges when it comes to settling down to sleep, such as:

- They may have been born prematurely – sometimes they have received a lot of nursing and touching in hospital and, when they get home, they expect the same amount of attention.
- Small babies have small stomachs and have to be fed more often.
- It may be harder to establish a routine if several people are helping to change, feed and care for the babies, however it is recommended that you persevere with this and educate all the helpers to follow the same routine.

Improving sleep habits – the first six months

A baby's sleeping habits only become settled and predictable if he or she is put to bed in the same way every night. Discuss and plan with your partner (if you have one) and other helpers a set routine for your babies' bedtime.

You may find that it takes a little while to read the sleeping and feeding needs of your babies. You might like to keep a record of what is occurring each day. You could make a chart to record feeds, sleeps and nappy changes.

If the babies are out of sync and are being fed too far apart, or one is always asleep when the other is awake, you will soon feel exhausted. The aim is to try and bring the babies' sleeping and feeding cycles together.

This may happen naturally but if not, making small adjustments of ten to fifteen minutes may help you. For example, if a single feed takes thirty minutes, when the first baby is fed, changed and settled, wake up the second baby and feed that one so that, if possible, they are both fed, changed and settled within an hour.

Waking a baby may seem harsh but once you have everyone sleeping simultaneously, organising your day will be easier and at night you will get back to bed sooner. Some suggestions for helping you cope include:

- Establish a set napping routine during the day.
- Put your babies to bed at the same time every night.
- Lead up to bedtime with a relaxation routine, including such things as warm baths, massage or soft music.

SIDS

According to SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) specialists, the safest way to sleep twins is to place them in their own cot and follow the steps to safe sleeping.

However, sometimes you may need to sleep twins in the same cot, for example when you are travelling or visiting and there is insufficient room for two cots. If this is the case, place each twin at opposite ends of the cot as this will minimise the risk of one twin covering the face of the other.

Improving sleep habits – six to 12 months

Your babies need to know the difference between night and day, and to realise that night-time is for sleeping. Some suggestions on settling them when they are six to 12 months old include:

- A regular relaxation and bedtime routine is just as important now as it was when they were younger.
- Put them to bed quickly, say goodnight and don't linger to talk or cuddle.
- Separate them if one baby is constantly waking up the other(s).
- Don't take a crying baby back to bed with you, or they will learn to cry just for the extra attention.

Improving sleep habits – toddlers

As children grow older, their sleep patterns change into more individual rhythms. You might find that each child now has slightly different sleeping needs. Some suggestions on settling your toddlers include:

- Encourage each child to have his or her own special bedtime toy.
- If they're playing up, do not threaten them with an early bedtime or else they will feel badly about going to bed.
- Similarly, don't punish them by sending them to their bedroom.
- Try not to let them nap past mid-afternoon.
- Don't read overly exciting or scary bedtime stories.
- Limit their television-watching time in the evening.

Things to remember

- Getting twins or HOMs to sleep at night is a common problem for parents.
- Twins or HOMs may cry and play in turns at night, which can be exhausting for parents.
- Setting up a familiar bedtime routine is important.

Where to get help

- Australian Multiple Birth Association Tel. 1300 886 499
- Multiple birth support groups
- Childcare nurses
- Your paediatrician
- Your doctor.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Multiple Birth Association

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