

Co-sleeping

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Several research studies have shown that keeping baby close to Mom at night helps everyone get more rest and results in longer breastfeeding duration.

La Leche League has encouraged mothers to consider arrangements to make breastfeeding at night easier, such as bringing the baby into bed. But recently some medical organizations in the U.S. and Canada have advised against sharing your bed with your baby, based on research that some experts (such as sleep researcher Dr. James McKenna) feel is flawed.

Even in bedsharing, though, breastfeeding makes a difference. British researcher Dr. Helen Ball found that breastfeeding mothers with their babies in bed usually sleep facing the baby, with one arm above the baby's head. In this position it is almost impossible to roll over on the baby (at least without dislocating your shoulder!). Mothers who are bottlefeeding are more likely to sleep with their backs to the baby, a potentially less-safe position.

There are other factors to take into consideration, too. Parents who smoke, or who are under the influence of medication, alcohol or drugs that might make them sleep too heavily, should not share a bed with their baby. Baby needs to sleep next to Mom, not between Mom and Dad or an older child. Waterbeds are considered to be more dangerous, and you need to be sure the baby can't fall off the bed and become trapped between the bed and the wall, for example.

When mothers feel they have to get up to feed their babies at night, they also run the risk of falling asleep on the couch or chair while nursing – which is obviously more dangerous. So La Leche League Canada continues to encourage mothers to bring their babies into bed at night, if they choose, and to be aware of the ways they can make co-sleeping safer.