

Safe co sleeping with babies: is it possible?

Some parents are unsure whether they should co sleep with their baby, but you might be surprised to hear that it is more common than you think.

According to [The Natural Child Project](#), co sleeping was commonplace worldwide until the 1700s and is still preferred in many cultures around the world. Now, however, it is a controversial topic, with even expert opinions contradicting one another.

Co sleeping refers to any sleeping arrangement where your baby is “[within sensory range](#)” meaning anywhere you can see, smell and hear them.

This includes bed sharing and the use of a co sleeping crib, but it is bed sharing that is responsible for the bad reputation.

Despite widespread acceptance in other countries, bed sharing is actively discouraged by officials in some Western countries.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) recommends co sleeping, but not bed sharing, and has acknowledged a co sleeping bed close to the parents’ as the optimal night-time scenario.

It might seem like an overwhelming decision, but there are ways you can make co sleeping safe and beneficial to your whole family.

Co sleeping can benefit everyone

Co sleeping can provide you with the ability to continue to nurture your bond with your baby (or babies!) while you sleep. With your baby sleeping next to you, you can provide reassurance using touch or sound without them needing to fully wake up.

Family health doctor [Bill Sears](#) claims that babies who co sleep are more likely to have a healthy, secure attachment with their primary caregiver (usually their mother). Co sleeping can then mean a reduced dependency on other objects such as pacifiers and blankets.

You might find that co sleeping also makes breastfeeding at night more pleasant because you do not have to get out of bed to feed your baby. Some women find that being able to respond to their baby when they start to murmur allows for a [more relaxing feed](#).

If you are a parent of twins, co sleeping could give you a chance to tend to one baby before they wake up the other!

This means both mom and dad can have a better night’s sleep, as no one will be woken up by babies crying. Sounds *dreamy*.

According to Dr. Sears, your baby's sleep can also be improved by co sleeping. He claims that some direct results of co sleeping are:

- Healthier breathing
- Less startles
- Reduced time spent crying
- Steadier heart rhythms
- More stable temperatures

Sears also notes that, as your baby grows up, co sleeping can lead to improved social development such as higher self-esteem, increased independence and improved self-reliance.

Advocates like Dr. Sears argue that safe co sleeping can reduce the possibility of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), although this view is not shared by advisories in many Western countries.

The co sleeping controversy

Despite the benefits, co sleeping is a controversial subject in America, with some critics even [campaigning for it to become illegal](#).

The most commonly mentioned problem is that, where safety precautions are not followed, co sleeping has led to accidents.

The U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) [specified their stance on co sleeping in 1999](#) after research suggested a higher rate of infant fatalities in babies who slept in the same bed as their parent(s).

The study found that some babies became trapped in furniture or were accidentally smothered by a sleeping parent. This caused the CPSC to issue an official advisory against co sleeping in general.

Some critics are also doubtful of the developmental benefits of co sleeping. Sleep psychologist [Dr. Lynelle Schneeberg](#) argues that children who sleep in their own bedrooms are more likely to grow up to be independent and less anxious.

Schneeberg also believes that having one or more children in your bed can impair your relationship with your partner by inhibiting intimacy and sometimes even forcing you to sleep separately.

As well as professional guidelines, some parents find that [social pressure puts them off](#). Due to the AAP's rejection of co sleeping, parents sometimes feel shame about their bed sharing arrangements, which can deter them from discussing it.

Despite the stigma, a whopping [76% of UK parents admit](#) to co sleeping sometimes! Unfortunately, 40% of those also admitted to having done so in an unsafe scenario, so it is important to remember the ways to make co sleeping safe.

How to co sleep safely

Despite the controversy, most experts agree that safe, intentional co sleeping is preferable to accidentally falling asleep in an unsafe position, such as on a chair while breastfeeding.

Also, many parents and professionals feel that official guidelines are outdated and misrepresentative.

Some experts have [heavily criticised the study](#) on which the CPSC based their recommendations. They claim that it does not take factors such as the SIDS epidemic at the time and the deaths of babies in separate cribs into account.

Many people offer [more recent studies](#), which have found that infant sleeping position is more important than where they sleep, as evidence that co sleeping can be done safely.

If you are worried about the safety of bed sharing, just remember the precautions you should take to ensure that it is safe.

The Lullaby Trust have created a simple video highlighting [how to co sleep safely](#), and all their information is supported by research.

They advise parents to place babies to sleep on their back naturally (without any object holding them in place) until they are old enough to roll over on their own.

They note that your shared bed should be kept clear of blankets or pillows that might entangle or smother them. This does not mean you cannot sleep with a blanket, but just that you should ensure that they are not near your baby's head.

The Trust's advice also suggests that you should only co sleep on a firm bed or another flat surface, where your baby cannot become trapped. This means you should never (ever!) co sleep on the sofa.

There are times when you will not be able to co sleep safely.

If you have drunk alcohol or taken medications that cause drowsiness that day then it is best for your baby to sleep in a separate bed. Sedatives reduce your awareness and have caused parents to accidentally smother their baby.

This also applies if you are extremely tired, as your ability to respond to your baby or babies will be lowered.

The advice also recommends waiting to co sleep with babies who were born premature or underweight until they are a few months older.

If you smoke, then it is never safe to co sleep. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), the remnants of toxic chemicals stay on a smoker's clothes and breath, meaning they can harm your baby and even lead to SIDS.

Co sleeping beds: the best of both worlds?

If you want to co sleep but do not want to share your bed, you might want to buy a co sleeping crib. This is a bassinet-style baby bed that attaches onto the side of your mattress so that your baby is within arm's reach but in their own sleeping area.

Some parents find that co sleeping beds allow their baby the safety of their own special bed, while still being able to soothe or feed them easily.

Co sleeping beds might also be preferable for some parents who cannot bed share, such as those who have consumed alcohol or cigarettes.

If you think co sleeping is for you but bed sharing isn't, check out our [5 favourite co sleeping beds](#).

Our absolute favourite for twins is the [Halo Sleep Twin Co Sleeper Bed](#), with sides that lower effortlessly for you to lift them out. This bed is perfect for feeding twins (or more!) because it spins 360 degrees so that you can reach both your babies and still get out of bed easily.

How to stop co sleeping

Whether you choose to co sleep or not, it might be reassuring to know that your decision is not irreversible.

Some people decide eventually that they want to stop co sleeping. As your babies grow into children, the practicalities of co sleeping are likely to change.

This can seem intimidating. After all, if your child has shared your bed all their life then they will not know any different, right?!

Do not despair. Whether your child is starting preschool or you just can't deal with a wriggly toddler – or two wriggly toddlers if you have twins – anymore, it is possible to change your sleeping arrangements, it will just take a little patience.

Pediatrician [Dr. Craig Canapari](#) offers some advice for stopping co sleeping. He recommends changing the routine slowly by sleeping with your child in their own bedroom for a few nights and then building up to leaving them alone.

Canapari also notes that you must be consistent and not allow them back into your bed until the sleeping habits you want are fully formed.

Safe co sleeping IS an option

It is up to you, and *only* you, whether you choose to co sleep or not.

The official advice is not to bed share, but many parents find that the benefits outweigh the risks if it can be done safely.

Remember that co sleeping does not always mean you have to share your bed and co sleeping with your baby or twins in adjacent beds is the recommended option in America right now.

If you do choose to bed share, make sure your babies sleep in safe co sleeping positions, on their back and unobstructed by pillows, blankets or toys.

Most importantly, do not let the stigma stop you from parenting your own way – nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of parents admit to co sleeping sometimes, so whatever you choose, you are definitely not alone!

Resources:

<https://pipandgrow.com/bed-sharing-safely/>

https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/child_death_review/Pages/Safe-Sleep.aspx

<https://abm.memberclicks.net/assets/DOCUMENTS/PROTOCOLS/6-cosleeping-and-breastfeeding-protocol-english.pdf>

https://www.naturalchild.org/articles/guest/tami_breazeale.html

<https://www.breastfeeding-problems.com/nursing-lying-down.html>

<https://www.romper.com/p/why-is-co-sleeping-illegal-in-some-places-18669>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/co-sleeping-benefits#safety>

<https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/health-concerns/sleep-problems/scientific-benefits-co-sleeping>

<https://www.kingofsleep.net/why-you-shouldnt-co-sleep-with-your-child/>

<https://www.parents.com/baby/sleep/co-sleeping/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-family-bed/>

<https://www.ncfr.org/ncfr-report/focus/ambivalence-new-research-co-sleeping-united-states>

<http://www.drmomma.org/2009/09/how-stats-really-stack-up-cosleeping-is.html>

<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/co-sleeping/>

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/08/Caring-for-your-baby-at-night-web.pdf>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953612002924>