

Multiples & Sleep: Tips for Parents of Twins and Triplets

Getting adequate sleep with a newborn in the house (and helping the baby sleep) is a challenge for any parent, but if you are the mother or father of more than one baby, this can be especially difficult to achieve. Additionally, I tip my hat to you! I know first hand just how tricky it can be to have routine or rest in a houseful of babies the same age. Though my nieces are now 18 years old, I remember all too well the brick walls my sister and brother-in-law came up against!

Yes, you CAN get them resting well, and get some sleep yourself, I promise. It is not easy, but it is so very worth it!

Believe it or not, I actually find that twins tend to end up being my best “clients”, because right from the get-go, they have to deal with being a wee bit more patient, and more noise (including sleeping through their twin’s grunts and groans) than their singleton friends.

When I work with families of multiples, I certainly cater my support and sleep coaching to the individual baby, but many parents are surprised to learn that part of my recommendations don’t greatly differ from those that my other families with only now baby, receive.



In saying that though, there are indeed some differences, so here you will find my top ten tips for everyone in a home of multiple babies or toddlers, to get some rest!

One: Many twins and triplets are born premature. Make sure to use their adjusted age when looking at guidelines, sleep habits, and sleep coaching or training.

While most experts will tell you that 38 weeks is considered “full term” for multiples, when looking at things like routine, feeding, awake times, amount of sleep that is optimal, and so on, it’s best to work with the corrected age. For example, if I am working with twins born at 37 weeks, and they are 5 months old, I would create a plan geared toward considering them as just over 4 months. This is important because careful consideration of ages and stages, and what is age appropriate developmentally, is a crucial part of

the coaching process. For parents working on sleep hygiene who are not using a coach, it is equally as important. Do keep in mind though, that every baby is different and you should consider your child's disposition and how you feel about their readiness to make change or implement routine.

Two: Put your babies to sleep in the same place every night.

Whether your babies have a room of their own or share a room with parents or siblings, it's important that you put them to sleep in the same place every night (and for naps during the day as much as possible.) Putting your children to bed in a familiar place lets them know they are safe and that they are in a place where sleep is to happen.

Three: Routine!

Consistency and predictability are *really* important to babies and toddlers. When they know what to expect at bedtime, it makes it *much* easier for them to make the transition from waking to sleeping. For multiples, this is *even more* important, if the rest of the family wishes to eat, sleep, shower, or have a break. It's not easy, especially in the early months, but you will come to be very very happy that you have them on the same sleeping and eating schedules, and they *will* adapt.

You can absolutely feed them at the same time - yes, really! If you are nursing you can nurse them both at once (providing you have patience and creativity) or you can store breast milk to bottle feed one while you nurse the other. If you formula feed, just get creative (perhaps sit on the couch with one on either side of you) and life will be much easier.

Once they are older (beginning between 4 and 6 months) and are capable of sleeping through on their own), then you would feed only the baby that has awoken, as they might have different sleep needs. By then, you will feel a little more rested (hopefully!) and be able to get up at different times if need be.

Four: Do your absolute best to teach them to fall asleep independently.

Again, this is challenging for all parents, but moreso with twins and triplets, because if they are fussing a great deal, they may be waking each other up. However, it is definitely not impossible and 98% of the families I work with, are successful in doing this. It would be too lengthy to explain the steps to achieving this, here, but feel free to check out the blog at eatplaysleep.ca for my recommendations on how to do so!

Five: Have reasonable and age appropriate expectations for them AND for yourselves.

For your own sanity and emotional well-being!

Six: Accept support!

And don't be afraid to ask for it! Whether it be the other parent, a sitter, a friend, your siblings, your inlaws, your parents, etc., you *must* be comfortable with reaching out. A worn-out, stressed, anxious, and/or upset parent, is easily sensed by babies and can make them feel anxious as well. Having support in the early months, or later when making changes, is crucial to your own emotional well-being, as well as

theirs. Not to mention your sanity. If you are hoping to get them eating and sleeping at the same-ish time, you'll definitely want to take advantage of a second set of hands as much as you need or want to.

Seven: Age appropriate amounts of awake times, to avoid them becoming overtired.

This is absolutely key as a tired or overwhelmed baby is never easy to put to sleep and they will usually sleep restlessly.

Eight: A routine bedtime and a bedtime routine

Choose an age appropriate and very consistent bedtime. The best time to put your baby to bed is sometime between 7 and 8 pm. This ensures that your child will be able to get a solid 11-12 hours in bed during the night, with wakings to eat of course, if they are infants. This time can fluctuate slightly based on the length and timing of the last nap, but should fall within 10 or 20 minutes of their bedtime.

It never too soon to start a routine. For newborns, this can be as simple as going into their room and changing them, putting on the swaddle/sleep sack, singing and soothing for a minute, and then laying them down, soothing them with some gentle touch and your voice.

For older babies, the routine can be longer, between 15 and 30 minutes. I find that children can easily become agitated if the routine is too long so unless it includes a bath every night, you may want to keep it closer to ten or 15 minutes. If you do not bathe them every day, bath should not be part of the bedtime routine, because it would not be the same each night. Instead, move bath time to after morning nap, or something similar. If you do bathe the babies every night, then by all means, have it as part of the bedtime routine.

Nine: The sleep environment

In part one of this topic, I discussed the importance of putting them to sleep in the same place every night. You also want to make some considerations about that environment and safety. The best and safest sleep practices include ensuring:

That the babies are not too hot. My rule of thumb is something similar to whatever they were comfortable wearing before bed, plus one layer such as a swaddle or sleep sack.

That they never have loose bedding or blankets in their sleeping environments. The sheets under them should be tight fitting and the swaddle should be tight. Companies such as Halo, make sleep sacks with a swaddle built in, so babies cannot possibly wiggle the swaddle over their faces.

That they are put to sleep on their backs.

Co-sleeping is a family choice, but I always caution against it. Breathing near a baby's face, changes their breathing. Co-sleeping and over-heating is also thought to be a contributing factor in some cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and SIDS is more prevalent in premature babies.

If you have the babies in one crib/bassinet (and they don't yet roll) it is okay to have them in the same bed. Later, if they are waking each other up or are rolling/bumping into each other, it would be best to

move them to their own cots. Many parents choose to have the cots side by side at first, so the baby knows their other sibling is still right there.

Please avoid bumper pads. They are unnecessary and dangerous.

Ten: Keep a detailed log.

Some parents use an app to keep tracked of feeds, naps, and everything in between which is fine if you have your phone or computer handy. I prefer a notebook because I can jot down whatever I want, when I need to, without logging into anything or being limited by the apps options. Logging things will allow you to see patterns emerge and assist you in knowing where you may want to make changes!

There you have it... my ten favourite tips to having well rested multiples. Of course, it's important to keep in mind that every child is a little different - there's no "magic formula" that will work 100% of the time for every baby!

Live Well!