

# Sharing a bed with your baby

## A guide for breastfeeding mothers

Breastfeeding is best for your baby's health and your own health. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the health benefits for you both.

**It is recommended that your baby shares a room with you for at least the first 6 months, as this helps with breastfeeding and protects babies against cot death.**

Bringing your baby into bed with you means that you can breastfeed in comfort. This may be why mothers who share a bed with their baby tend to breastfeed for longer than those who don't.

As it is easy to fall asleep while breastfeeding, especially when lying down, there are some important points to consider before taking your baby into bed with you.

In particular, adult beds are not designed with infant safety in mind. Babies can die if they get trapped or wedged in the bed or if a parent lies on them. So the safest place for a baby to sleep is in a cot by your bed.

However, you can reduce the risk of accidents and, because bed sharing helps with breastfeeding, you may find this leaflet useful.

### Important – when not to sleep with your baby

**Smoking increases the risk of cot death.** You should make sure that you don't fall asleep with your baby in your bed if you (or any other person in the bed) are a smoker, even if you never smoke in bed.

Falling asleep with your baby is also dangerous if you (or any other person in the bed) might find it hard to respond to the baby. For example if you:

- have drunk alcohol
- have taken any drug (legal or illegal) which could make you extra sleepy

- have any illness or condition that affects your awareness of your baby
- are otherwise unusually tired to a point where you would find it difficult to respond to your baby.

It also may be safest not to bed share in the early months if your baby was born preterm, was small at birth or if he has a high temperature.

**Never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.** Sofas are very dangerous for babies as they can become trapped down the sides or in the cushions.

## Reduce the risk of accidents and overheating

**Sofas are very dangerous for babies.** Never lie down or fall asleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.

**Adult beds are not designed for babies.** To prevent your baby overheating, suffocating or becoming trapped:

- The mattress must be firm and flat – waterbeds, bean bags and sagging mattresses are not suitable;
- Make sure that your baby can't fall out of bed or get stuck between the mattress and the wall;
- The room must not be too hot (16–18°C is ideal);
- Your baby should not be overdressed – he should not wear any more clothes than you would wear in bed yourself;
- The covers must not overheat the baby or cover the baby's head;
- Your baby must not be left alone **in** or **on** the bed as even very young babies can wriggle into dangerous positions;
- Your partner should know if your baby is in the bed;
- If an older child is also sharing your bed, you or your partner should sleep between the child and the baby;
- Pets should not share a bed with your baby.

If you have any questions, your midwife or health visitor will be able to advise

### Your sleeping position

If you are bed sharing, it is important to make sure that your baby cannot go under the covers or into the pillow.

Most mothers who are breastfeeding naturally sleep facing their baby with their body in a position that protects the baby by stopping him moving up or down the bed (see picture).

Your baby will usually lie on his side to breastfeed. When not actually feed-



ing, he should be put on his back to sleep, never on his front or side.

**If you are bottle feeding the safest place for your baby to sleep is in a cot by your bed.**