



#### Standard 4: Sleep with your baby for night feedings

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics discourages bedsharing, some experts such as Dr. James McKenna and infant sleep researcher and author, think bedsharing can be done safely and that it has many benefits to both mom and baby. Dr. James McKenna's sleep studies show moms curling themselves in a protective manner around their babies as they sleep. Also, their sleep cycles often synchronize so closely so that the moms wake up moments before their babies start to stir. This special awareness mothers have of their babies reduces the risk of SIDS (*The Baby Book, Revised and Updated Edition 2013*, p.120-122).

By nursing a few times at night, which bedsharing babies tend to do, your milk supply is stimulated. Many babies actually take in a large portion of their daily calories during those nighttime nursings. Breast stimulation at night contributes more to lactational amenorrhea than the same number of nursings during the day. Some moms do not start ovulating and cycling again until their babies do not need to nurse anymore at night.

If you are a new mom or even a mom of more than one child, you know how exhausting nighttime parenting can be at times. The nice aspect of breastfeeding is that it minimizes the times you need to get out of bed and even wake up completely. Ask a mom who breastfeeds and bedshares just how many times the baby wakes to nurse. She very well may tell you she has no idea!

How lovely it is for both mom and baby (and dad, too!) when all the baby has to do is stir a little bit and the mom half wakes up, latches the baby on and all go back to sleep (dad probably never even heard the baby at all). The alternative to breastfeeding and co-sleeping is to get up out of your warm bed and make a bottle of formula in the kitchen. Then, if you follow the World Health Organization guidelines, you will need to first boil the water to kill possible pathogens present before mixing it with powdered or concentrated formula. Latching baby on and going back to sleep in 30 seconds sounds a lot more appealing!

Characteristics of a safe bedsharing surface include:

- Having a firm mattress with no gaps at the head and foot boards
- tight fitting sheets
- light blankets instead of heavy ones
- no pillows near baby's face

Please do NOT bedshare if:

- either you or your husband smokes at all; smoking is one of the biggest risk factors
- you or your spouse are intoxicated, on sleep inducing medication, or very tired

- your baby is under the age of one years old and there are other children or pets in your bed; older children are not as aware of the baby while sleeping as you are
- the bed contains soft bedding, pillows, gaps between the mattress and bed frame or wall or bedrail,

Also, dressing your baby in heavy clothing, putting your baby to sleep on his stomach, swaddling him, and sleeping with your baby on a couch all increase the risks of harm to your baby (*The Baby Book, Revised and Updated Edition*, p.350-351).

On a personal note, a king-size bed has made bedsharing so much more comfortable for us, especially as each baby becomes a toddler. Toddlers tend to sleep in unusual positions and sometimes take up more room than Mom and Dad! I also know some couples who sleep with their baby on a mattress on the floor; we did this with our first for part of the first year. Be creative and design your own special safe bedsharing area.

What about marital intimacy while bedsharing? This is another area where creativity comes into play. If your baby is young, you could put him in a little bassinet on the floor. If he is older, a crib or toddler bed mattress on the floor works well, too. You and your husband can also spend some couple time in a spare room or guest room in your house after your baby goes to sleep for the night. Just remember to think outside the box and find what works for you and your husband!