

Feeding your baby at night

Your milk making hormone levels are highest at night. Therefore this is a really beneficial time to breastfeed.

So, to enable you to rest whilst you are breastfeeding, what strategies do mothers use for this time?

It is helpful to learn how to breastfeed lying down. In this way you can doze whilst your baby breastfeeds. The principles of positioning still apply - you have your baby lying on the mattress, close to you on his or her side, nose to nipple. Have your baby's body in a straight line so that he is not twisted. Ensure that he can tilt his head back to come into your breast with his chin leading the way.

Many mothers find it easiest to put their own underneath arm up under the pillow so that the baby can lie on the mattress rather than cradled in their arm as this can result in your baby being a bit too high for your breast. You can then use your other arm to come over your baby, behind his shoulders and support him that way.

Mothers often fall asleep whilst breastfeeding especially when feeling relaxed or tired. We suggest that you ensure that you both have none of the risk factors for bedsharing if you are likely to fall asleep.

What are the benefits of bedsharing with your baby?

Mothers describe a better quality of sleep. Although your baby breastfeeds much more often, you do not have to fully awake and both of you can doze back to sleep.

Your baby's sleep cycle is one hour so he'll rouse every hour. The only thing known to change an adult's sleep cycle of one and a half hours is to take their baby into bed with them. The sleep cycles then synchronise at one hour. This is why studies have shown that 75% of breastfeeding mothers will take their baby into bed with them at some stage during the night.

When you rouse a little together, mothers naturally check their baby without realising it. There is a mother-baby interaction throughout the night.

Breastfeeding mothers naturally make a protective nesting position around their baby. They lie their baby within this nest thus stopping the

This is a basic information sheet although GBSN hopes that it answers some of your questions. If you have further questions you may like to phone a Breastfeeding Counsellor. A list of their phone numbers may be found in the pink leaflet that you brought home from hospital "where to find support when breastfeeding". National Breastfeeding Helpline numbers are on the website. For convenience your baby may be referred to as "he". Written by Elizabeth Mayo, 2009.

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baby going up under the pillow or down under the bedding. Mothers often lie with their knees curled up and their arm over the baby preventing falling on top of the baby.

When should you not share a bed with your baby?

Although we have Stone Age babies, we live in a modern industrial society which brings modern environments. Bedding can cause a baby to overheat, mattresses can be too soft, pets might be around wanting to lie on the baby.

There are things that a parent might take which will alter the level of responsiveness to their baby - alcohol, drugs, medications. If a parent is at risk of blackouts, they are advised not to bedshare - maybe if they have epilepsy or diabetes. If either parent smokes, even if only 1 per day, they are advised not to bedshare because of the danger to the baby. Parents who have chosen to formula feed are also advised not to bedshare - this is because they tend not to make that "nest".

For more info ask your midwife. You can download Bedsharing with your baby (UNICEF/FSID) on

<http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk/pdfs/sharingbedleaflet.pdf>

Helen Ball has done a lot of research about bedsharing - her website is <http://www.dur.ac.uk/sleep.lab/>

James McKenna has also published extensively -

<http://www.nd.edu/~jmckenn1/lab/>

Research has shown that it is really dangerous to fall asleep on a sofa with your baby so it is worth thinking about strategies that can help you to get through the nights.