

# But is Bed Sharing Safe?

Excerpt from *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*

You might be surprised to know that how safe your baby is in your bed depends in part on how you are feeding the baby. Studies indicate that a formula-feeding mother who sleeps with her baby tends to keep the baby up near or even on the pillows, a suffocation risk, and may or may not sleep facing him. A breastfeeding mother spends most of the night facing her baby. She brings a leg up and her lower elbow forward, creating a protective “fort” for her baby, who sleeps down at the breast where suffocation is actually much less of a risk. James McKenna, infant sleep researcher, and author of the book *Sleeping With Your Baby*, calls the mother the “sleep architect” for her baby, helping him maintain a healthy, not-too-deep sleep rhythm from the start, and gradually moving him toward more mature sleep patterns. A sober nursing mother is not a danger to her child. She will *not* roll over on her baby. Partners may not be as aware of their babies when they’re sleeping. So in the early months, consider keeping the baby closer to you. (continued on page 2)

If you’re a non-smoking, breastfeeding mother sleeping on a regular mattress and not taking anything that might make you extra sleepy, you’ve got most of the potential bed-sharing concerns covered. If there are risk factors that you can’t control, you might want to look for other ways to keep your baby closer to you at night.

## *Guidelines for Sleeping Safely with Your Baby*

Notice that most of this list is about suffocation, not SIDS! The Two are often confused. But SIDS has nothing to do with suffocation. The commonsense measures below help protect a baby from furniture and bedding problems.

- Don’t have anyone in the bed who has been drinking or taking drugs/medications that can impair alertness.
- Don’t have anyone in the bed who smokes, even if he or she doesn’t smoke in the bed.
- Don’t have anyone in the bed who is too exhausted or ill to return to normal consciousness quickly.
- Don’t sleep with your baby on a couch or sofa, recliner, armchair, soft or saggy mattress, or waterbed.
- Don’t use a thick duvet or comforter (a few layers of blankets are fine).
- Don’t put your baby’s head on a pillow.
- Make sure the sheets fit snugly.
- Keep pets off the bed.
- Make sure there are no spaces between the mattress and frame or between the bed and the wall where the baby could become trapped.
- Don’t have an older child in the bed, if you do, keep an adult between the baby and the older child.
- Don’t swaddle the baby.
- Don’t leave the baby alone in or on your bed. Even a small baby can wriggle himself off the bed or into a risky position.
- Dress your baby about as warmly as you dress yourself – your body will provide a lot of heat!