The Controversial but Common Practice of Bed Sharing

Bed sharing, also known as *co-sleeping* or *co-bedding*, refers to a caregiver sleeping in the same bed as an infant. This practice takes place in many cultures including the United States. In this month's *JAMA Pediatrics*, a large research study found that between 1993 and 2010 the number of US caregivers who bed share with infants had increased from 6% to 13.5%.

Potential Benefits of Bed Sharing

- Breastfeeding: Bed sharing can provide easy access for mom and baby to breastfeed throughout the night. Research studies, including a study in this month's *JAMA Pediatrics*, found that babies who were bed sharing had both higher rates and longer duration of breastfeeding. Among caregivers who decide to bed share, about 60% said it was to breastfeed.
- Parent sleep: Studies suggest that parent sleep is improved by bed sharing, because the baby can be fed or settled down quickly without having to stand up or walk to another room. Bed sharing makes pacifier reinsertion easier and some parents may feel that they sleep better just knowing their baby is near.
- Bonding: Bonding between a caregiver and baby is promoted by skin-to-skin contact through the night.

Potential Risks of Bed Sharing

- Accidental suffocation: Studies show an association between bed sharing and risk of accidental suffocation. This could happen if a caregiver accidently pulls the covers over a baby so that he or she cannot breathe or rolls over onto the baby while sleeping.
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS): Research studies show that bed sharing is associated with a nearly 3-fold increased risk of SIDS, increasing to 6-fold among smoking mothers. There is no evidence that bed sharing protects against SIDS.

For parents who decide to bed share, there are several safety practices to consider:

- Do a safety check of the sleep environment: The sleep environment includes the type and size of bedding and all the pillows and blankets on the bed. Remove all excess pillows, heavy blankets, quilts, and comforters to reduce the risk that your baby will be trapped under these coverings. Ensure that the bed is large enough for the caregiver(s) and infant without the infant rolling off or a caregiver rolling onto the infant. Do not take toys or stuffed animals into the bed, as these may increase the risk of suffocation. Bed sharing on a couch has a much higher risk because the infant can become trapped in the cushions, roll off the couch, or become trapped between the couch and caregiver.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol: Parents who bed share should ensure that the bedroom is smoke free and avoid alcohol use before bedtime, which may impact a caregiver's sleep and ability to recognize that the infant is in danger.
- Room temperature: Bedrooms that are hot and stuffy lead to more risks that the infant will become overheated.
- Proximal sleep environment: Placing the baby's crib alongside the parent bed keeps the baby very close but minimizes safety risks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx

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