

What parents **NEED** to **KNOW** about **MULTIPLES**

As parents of twins, triplets, or even larger sets of multiples, you may feel your situation is unique. But the truth is, you have lots of company. The rate of multiple gestation and delivery is at record high levels worldwide. One in every 250 American deliveries is a multiple birth. For every 1,000 live births in 2003, 32 sets of twins and two sets of triplets were delivered—an increase of roughly 65% in the frequency of multiple deliveries over the preceding 15 years. But if multiple births are no longer rare, they still present special challenges for you and your children. The information that follows should help you cope.

You may already know that multiple pregnancies have higher rates of complications than singleton gestations. You probably were monitored more closely than friends carrying only one baby. Your babies may have been born prematurely and spent time in the neonatal intensive care unit, a situation that made bonding more difficult than with a full-term, singleton birth. So from the outset, your relationship with these children has been more complicated and your anxiety level higher than those of other parents.

When you bring your newborns home from the hospital, the usual stresses faced by parents of newborns are magnified. Feeding, crying, sleepless nights, diaper changes are all—like your babies—multiplied. Exclusive breastfeeding may turn out to be an unattainable goal. Many parents of multiple newborns have to grapple with feelings of inadequacy and depression.

While your children are infants, you need and deserve help in caring for them. Learn to reach out for support and practical assistance: to friends, your parents, and—if you can afford it—hired help. Turn to the internet to find to Web sites, magazines, and support groups for parents of twins. As multiple births have become more frequent, resources and supports have multiplied as well.

Your toddlers may not reach developmental milestones at the age childrearing books (or your inlaws and girlfriends) tell you is “right,” especially if they were pre-

mature. Many multiples exhibit some delay in language development, although most outgrow it. When you have questions about development, bring them to us; monitoring development and helping you find help when problems arise is a basic aspect of pediatric care.

When your children are school age, remember that you know them better than anyone else does. You have the deciding vote when it comes to choices about whether to dress the children alike, or enroll them in the same activities, or keep them together or apart in the schoolroom.

Finding an individual identity is a central task of adolescence. It is always difficult and perhaps more so for a child who has always been part of a “set.” With steady emotional support from you, your children will accomplish it at their own pace.

Raising twins or higher order multiples has special rewards as well as challenges: the simultaneous giggles of toddlers at play; two or three smiling faces at the end of the day; seeing the pleasure your twin teens take in each other’s accomplishments; knowing your children have “friends for life.” Ample research illustrates twins’ propensity for pro-social behavior, solid relationships with peers, and sturdy self-image. So worry less, and enjoy watching them grow.



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