

bringing up BABIES

DOING DOUBLE, OR TRIPLE, DUTY? TWO MOMS OF TWINS SHARE THEIR TRIED-AND-TRUE STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING AND ENJOYING — YES, ENJOYING! — LIFE WITH MULTIPLES. HERE, SIX WAYS TO GET STARTED

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1 everyday BASICS

A lot of day-to-day multiple management is trial and error—and we made our fair share of mistakes before figuring out what worked for us. Check out a few of the logistical solutions that made our lives easier:

- When our babies had enough neck control, we **simultaneously bottle-fed** them while they were propped up on pillows side by side to save time. You can also plop them in their car seat buckets and do the same thing.
- We **used propping tools** to help hold bottles in place (yeah, we know it's “wrong”). Cathleen bought a great hands-free baby-bottle holder—the Milk Maid (\$15; greatbabyproducts.com)—that she heard of through the mommy grapevine. We recommend buying one for each baby.
- We **kept plastic bottles from taking over our kitchens** by immediately hand-washing them. At the end of the day, we'd refill them and load up the fridge for the next day. No can do? Don't feel guilty about running the dishwasher day and night.
- Once we started the twins on **solid foods**, we placed two high chairs right next to each other and sat on a chair in

Meet triplets Bridget, Abby, and Colleen, 9 months old

front of the babies to spoon-feed them their mush. (Watch out for the cross-tray grab once Cheerios are introduced!) You can also use infant feeding seats, a space- and money-saving alternative to high chairs (see “Stuff You Need for Multiples,” page 35).

● We were sticklers for safety when **changing diapers**. If one twin pooped, we put the other one in the crib with toys until the changing was done. (We kept the lights on so she knew it wasn't bedtime, and we took the toys back out of the crib for sleepyparty.)

● We kept **two well-stocked diaper-changing stations**—one upstairs and one downstairs—filled with fresh clothes and burpies.

● We're still trying to master **the art of bathing twins**. When ours were infants, separate baths were more manageable. As they got sturdier, one giant pool party with seats in the tub worked. Once they outgrew the seats, they had the freedom to splash...and get us completely soaked.

● We faced up to the fact that two babies generate **a huge amount of laundry**. If we didn't wash it every day, the dirty piles of clothes, sheets, and burpies would haunt us. There were plenty of other things to let slide around the house—cleaning, cooking—but not this chore. We didn't bother with folding, though; we'd just rifle through the clean wash basket and pick out the stuff we needed.



2 breastfeeding WHAT WORKED FOR US

Oodles of moms of multiples don't breastfeed at all, and that's nothing to feel guilty about. But since we had positive experiences nursing our older kids, we wanted to try breastfeeding our twins, too. Despite our best efforts, we had mixed results with our multiples. Here's what *did* work for us:

supplementing with formula. Surprisingly, both of our ob's and pediatricians encouraged us to alternate nursing with bottle-feeding formula or to top off just-nursed babies with a formula bottle. They suggested that supplementing would be less physically taxing on us, plus we wouldn't be worrying that our babies weren't nourished.

getting help. Our docs also said that if we wanted to avoid mommy meltdowns those first 12 weeks, we needed to have feeding assistants who could hand us pillows for propping nursed babies or hold babies for bottle feedings. That's where our friends and family came in handy.

trying different holds. Sometimes we nursed our twins simultaneously, using the popular double-clutch (latch babies one at a time with the football hold, tucking their legs in close under your elbow, pointing toward your back) or cross-cradle positions (latch babies one at a time with a cradle hold, keeping their heads apart and their legs and feet crisscrossed). Other times, when no one was around to help with the latching and pillow propping, we nursed one twin at a time, usually while the other one was screaming. While nursing, we tried to comfort the crying twin by singing and rubbing his feet.

3 finding other MOMS WHO GET IT

Trust us, you need to protect your sanity by having at least one pal who gets what it's like to have two or more babies at once. Here's how to find one:

● **Join a mothers-of-multiples club.** The National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc. (nomotc.org) is the best-known resource.

● **Call nearby kiddie gyms and baby classes.** Ask which activities are frequented by moms of multiples.

● **Connect with patients of your pediatrician or ob.** Post a playgroup sign-up in their waiting rooms.

becoming scheduling junkies. We thought we were type A before we had twins. Ha! We were both so overwhelmed by our double bundles, and dealing with their older siblings, that we had to create some sense of order in our topsy-turvy lives. Our twins' feeding and sleeping routines had to be superstrict in order for us to stay sane. This meant we sometimes had to leave the park before older siblings were ready or stay home when they were dying to go out, so that we could nurse according to schedule.

making the pump our friend. Christina stopped nursing after a couple of weeks and bought a souped-up double pump that she used every four hours, even in the middle of the night, to keep the breast milk flowing. She mixed her milk with formula and fed it to the twins in bottles.

being prepared. Before we fed the twins, we'd ask our bigger kids if they needed anything, so feedings wouldn't be interrupted by coloring-book requests. We also made sure we always had a safe place to rest the babies if we needed to put one down while we relatched or burped the other. >

4 get-some-sleep SECRETS

- When our twins were congested, they napped upright (for better nasal drainage and breathing) in their car seats.
- We recognized their individual sleep styles. One twin preferred to be tightly swaddled in a Moses basket, while the other sprawled out in the bassinet.
- They stayed in the same room even when one was screaming. They had to get used to the noise. Neither of us lives in a mansion, you know.
- We ignored our prejudice against pacifiers and introduced them to our twins early on. Since then, the American Academy of Pediatrics announced that pacifiers have a protective effect against SIDS—yay!
- We used the vibrate function on their bouncy seats and portable cribs to lull them to sleep. (We bought batteries in bulk.)
- We stuck to their eat, play, and sleep routines. The schedule afforded the babies some stability—they knew what to expect and so did we. As a bonus, it was easier to have relief come in and follow the routine.

6 twin TRUTHS

- 1. guilt is a constant.** You're pulled in two directions trying to meet the demands of your two babies. It's hard not to feel bad when you're tending to one before the other.
- 2. you learn to lower the bar.** We let some things slide, like allowing the older kids to watch TV during breakfast while we dressed the twins. Or we gave the twins cookies at 6 A.M. so we could empty the dishwasher without them crawling into it.
- 3. you feel like you're on display.** When we take our multiples out in public, we can end up feeling like a sideshow circus attraction. Sometimes the attention is lovely, but when we have 100 things to do between meals and naps and preschool pickups, we have no time to waste. Sorry! We will be more polite when our kids are in college.
- 4. twins are a financial drain.** Because we had to buy additional car seats, bigger cars, and other stuff for the babies, we had very little cash left to spend on ourselves.
- 5. twins aren't always best friends.** Seeing one twin bite or hit the other is common—and upsetting. It makes you think you'll always have to protect the less aggressive one. And then you get ticked at yourself for labeling them.

5 how to get THE HELP YOU NEED

We weren't the kind of gals who took people up on favors—until we had twins. Now's the time to say yes to help. Professional childcare is expensive, and since we spent a small fortune on baby gear, we had to get creative about who could help us and how they could best contribute. Here's where we found our backup:

our husbands. Our guys tried to stay out of our way because we were like crazy mother cyclones whirling through the house. It was easy to get pissed at them for not offering to help, until we realized that they were just looking for direction. We determined their strengths—running errands for us, assembling cribs and toys, answering phone calls and e-mails about the babies, bathing them, and preparing simple meals—and delegated tasks to them.

our parents. Our moms and dads couldn't have been more delighted about our twins, but they weren't excited to do our laundry or mop our floors. We soon realized that sitting and folding clothes could be relaxing (with the right show on the tube), so we let our moms do the things they *wanted* to do, like change diapers and hold and feed babies. Our dads sang Irish ditties and told bar jokes to calm the screaming infants.

our siblings. Christina's sister, who was expecting her second child at the time, visited once a day for the first three months, glad to refresh her feeding, burping, and diapering skills. And Cathleen's brothers set up kiddie-pool water slides and played backyard baseball with her two older boys while she fed the babies and focused on postpartum recovery.

our neighborhoods. Christina's neighborhood is famous for passing around a sign-up sheet to make any new mom on the block a family dinner. Each night for a whole month, a different neighbor prepared a meal for her brood! (If you haven't delivered yet, perhaps you could start this tradition for another new mom in the hood so that you can benefit when *your* turn comes.)

our gift givers. If we were given a baby gift in person, we were bold enough to ask for a pass on writing the thank-you note. We'd always hear a big "of course!" in reply. Better still, if you're creating a wish list for a baby shower, ask that one of your gifts be a reprieve from penning thank-you cards.

- 6. but the bond between them is undeniable.** It's remarkable to watch your babies communicate, sometimes in their own language; defend each other; and be the only ones to consistently laugh at each other's jokes. Even twins who look nothing alike or are different genders can foster a uniquely strong relationship that will last a lifetime. ●

Christina Boyle and Cathleen Stahl are cowriting a book about twins, to be published by Three Rivers Press in spring 2008, as well as a blog, TwinSetMoms.com. Find more of their multiples advice online at Babytalk.com.