

When Baby Makes Four

Everyone knows having a baby changes your life and that just one eight pound bundle of joy can turn your world upside down. But more and more parents are finding that the one bundle they expected turns out to be two, or more. While most parents feel twice blessed, there is no doubt that having a multiple birth offers unique challenges to parents.

The differences between a single baby and multiples start with the pregnancy. Carrying more than one child puts mothers into a medical high risk category and the added worry of pre-term delivery. Frequent doctor's visits, medical tests, and greater physical discomfort brings a mother to the point of exhaustion even before the babies are born.

Double vision

One of the first things parents do when they bring a newborn home is get to know their baby—how they feel, smell, or even cry. But getting to know two at once is harder and it is the careful parent who resists lumping the children together as the “twins”. Well-meaning family members may call the babies by their collective identity simply because they may not be able to tell the infants apart (even fraternal twins). But most parents are surprised not by how alike their babies are, but by how different in temperament, mood, and style they can be.

On Stage

Parents of newborns get lots of attention when they bring their babies out in public and parents of twins can usually draw a good size crowd. Give the kids cherubic faces and adorable matching outfits and both parents and babies can be overwhelmed by the attention they receive. Along with the compliments, however, many parents find themselves having to fend off personal and intrusive questions, such as questions about genetics, fertility, and which baby is better. Just smile and keep on moving the stroller.

Tips for Survival

- Ask for help. Two babies, alike as they may be, may have different schedules and rhythms, leaving parents weary and exhausted from around the clock feedings and no sleep. Twins mean that you always need an extra set of hands and parents have to ask for, and accept help from, all family and friends who offer. If not enough people offer, start crying and they may come to the rescue.
- Give up the supermom myth. Perfection needs to be thrown out the window, and survival given priority. Do what has to be done and take shortcuts whenever you can.
- Get rest. Sleep deprivation can make the most compassionate parent cranky, and with two kids you will feel bone tired. Rest when the babies do, and try to catch naps and quiet time throughout the day.