

“I am pregnant with multiples and have been ordered to bedrest by my Doctor. How will this help my babies and me? How will I pass the time? How can I relieve my boredom?”

These are all valid questions. It isn't unusual for a woman expecting multiples to be placed on bedrest. There are many reasons why this might be necessary. They include: water retention, spotting, high blood pressure, signs of premature labour, one or more of the babies not growing at a satisfactory rate (e.g. weight discrepancies, multiples not developing at the same rate or gestational diabetes, a pregnancy related diabetes). Bedrest produces many benefits for both mother and babies. It relieves the pressure on the cervix and assures that calories and nutrients that would normally go to the mother's activities are diverted to the babies.

There are several levels of bedrest:

- At home in bed or lying down and being allowed up for very short periods of time
- Hospitalized and allowed up to the bathroom only
- Hospitalized and NOT allowed to leave the bed
- Hospitalized and the bed tilted with your feet upwards (tredelenburg position)
- Hospitalized weekdays and allowed out on the weekends with specific instructions

It is not always easy to be hospitalized. You may have children at home and this can be traumatic and upsetting for everyone. Stress related to additional child-care situations can be harmful. Use your support system, family, friends and neighbours. If you are permitted to leave for the weekend, this can help alleviate some of the pressure of not being available for your children, while maintaining a safe environment for your unborn babies. When explaining to your child(ren) why Mom is not at home, use age appropriate language, use language that is clear and comforting. Whenever possible, the child(ren) should be taken to hospital to visit with Mom, allowing them to see for themselves where Mom is and what her day involves. If it is your child(ren)'s preference to stay at home instead of visiting the hospital, try to accommodate their wishes. Keep your child(ren)'s routine the same, whenever possible.

There are many things that you can do during your bedrest stage.

Now is the time to read and learn all about multiples and your unique and special situation

- Keep a calendar by your bedside to cross off the days
- Pick one night a week to do something special with your partner, order in, watch a movie
- You can knit, crochet, needlepoint, write letters, read, surf the internet...
- Keep a daily journal, it is very rewarding and fulfilling to look back on this period of time and share it with your children

If you are hospitalized, ask if there are other mothers expecting multiples, also on bedrest. Often having someone in the same situation as you can provide comfort and companionship.

For mothers of higher order multiples, it is almost inevitable that an extensive period of your pregnancy will be spent on bedrest. Be aware of special exercises that will help decrease joint and muscle stiffness in bed. Ask to speak to a physiotherapist. This will also be helpful after your babies are born. You may have muscles which have atrophied and there may be a need for ongoing physiotherapy after your release from hospital. Walking may be uncomfortable, because of pelvic bones shifting back into place and sore achy muscles. As well, softened skin on the balls of the feet may need to harden again.

This time on bedrest can make a positive difference in the health of your babies, assisting them in gaining weight and completing their development. Each day your babies remain in utero is a day less in a Special Care Nursery. There can be no safer environment for your multiples than that which your body can provide.

Most of us are highly motivated, active people accomplishing a great deal. It can be quite difficult for a person who is used to activity, to be forced to remain quiet and in bed. Many women still feel quite healthy, but are forced into an “illness” role. It is not uncommon to experience negative feelings in this situation. It is important that a support network be used to discuss these feelings. You are not alone. Many of our multiple support groups offer a bedrest support line, staffed by women who have been in your situation and are not home with their babies. Contact your nearest Multiple Births Canada Chapter, for further information on this support line.

Additional Resources

- *The Joy of Twins and other Multiple Births*, by Pamela Patrick Novotny, Crown Paperbacks, Inc.
- *Multiple Blessings*, by Betty Rothbart, Hearst Books
- *Twins! Pregnancy, Birth and the First Year of Life*, by Connie L. Agnew, Alan H. Klein and Jill Allison Granon
- *Eating Well While on Bedrest*, by Julie Watson-Blasioli and Pauline Brazeau-Gravelle, Ottawa Hospital
- *Twin Care: Prenatal to Six Months*, Multiple Births Canada
- *Development in Utero*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series
- *Expectant Mom Tips*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series
- *Signs & Symptoms of Preterm Labour*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series
- *You're Having Multiples*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series

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