

## Congratulations!

You may be feeling “Why me?” “Oh, this is so neat!” “Oh my, what have we done?” “How can we afford all these babies?”. Either way there is an element of shock and you wonder how you are going to cope. These are some of the typical reactions experienced by parents upon learning they are expecting multiples.

Initially, you might be scared, overwhelmed and yet excited. By the time the babies arrive, you are calmed down a lot. Then you are scared again – but usually not quite as scared as when you first found out. We have found that parents initially react with surprise and some trepidation. However, once they get used to the idea they’re having 2, 3, or more, they begin to bond with their babies and they want nothing less than healthy babies at the end of it. Parents of triplets, quadruplets or more have an additional psychological adjustment to make. They have to acknowledge the possibility that some of their babies might not make it to term as higher order multiples are often premature.

While you are waiting for the arrival of the babies, here are some tips from other parents of multiples:

- Cooking extra casseroles for the freezer (say YES when someone volunteers to do this for you!).
- Set up a schedule of helpers needed for when the babies arrive home (make a list of those things that need to be done before the babies arrive home).
- Start borrowing clothes, cribs, car seats (always carefully check out second-hand equipment and furniture – make sure all of it meets SAFETY STANDARDS).
- Go to your local semi-annual multiple-birth Chapter clothing sale (join the Chapter and shop till you drop!).
- Learn to ask for help – there are times in your life that you need help and this is one of those times! (Never say NO THANKS!)
- Accept help – but on your terms (when, how often, who and most specifically with what tasks)
- Allocate specific tasks to anyone who volunteers to help – do you want them to help with the laundry, the housework or care for the babies? (dusting, grocery shopping, taking a sibling for an outing, laundry, help with bathing babies, etc. – make a list).
- REST! This is extremely important – do it now because for the next 20 years until they leave home – you will not get any!! (Make a sign for the door – “Mom sleeping – babies too! Come back another time!”.)
- Check with your doctor or hospital to find out if they are offering prenatal classes geared for parents expecting multiples.

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Having accepted and are finally thrilled with the idea of expecting twins or more, parents of multiples need to make some practical preparations for the period after the babies' birth – it is crucial expectant parents plan ahead. Parents of twins, triplets and higher order support Chapters exist in almost every province in Canada. The best advice you will ever receive is to contact other parents of multiples – they know what it is like and have many tips, shortcuts and ideas to share!

For parents of higher order multiples, it is even more crucial to make the most of volunteers. Parents of multiples are desperate for volunteer help because there is no comprehensive government program to financially assist them. This means parents need to contact their local volunteer bureau, contact their local twins and triplets support club, hire a teenager or grandmother to come and help out for a few hours a day or week.

Parents of multiples need to be able to turn to each other for support. Parenting at the best of times is a joint effort and even more so when multiples are involved - the importance of the father/partner role cannot be over-emphasized. Lend each other a sympathetic ear – you will live through it- *the babies eventually will sleep through the night!*

### More Tips!!

- Buy yourself 7 nightgowns/pajama sets – one for every day of the week. You may not have a chance to shower and get dressed but putting on a fresh set will make you feel like you did!
- Take care of yourself – pamper yourself during your pregnancy!
- Take care of your babies – enjoy them and the miracle of their birth.

Make time with your husband/partner – *no matter how busy you get*, it is important to get a babysitter & go out by yourselves just to be with each other. If you lose that, there goes the family and it can be very challenging to raise multiples on your own. Encourage your partner with ways they can be helpful.

Important Keys to Survival – Plan ahead and do much of the physical work before the birth of the babies. Eg. Paint the room set up the cribs, etc.

### Remember...

- Your babies are more important than housework – dust is going to be there forever – think of it as a “protective coating for furniture!” Put away the knick-knacks so when it is time to clean, it can be done quickly with less fuss.
- Friends and relatives love to give gifts! Take advantage of them now!
- When a friend wants to give you a “BABIES Shower” suggest a “Stock the Freezer” Shower!

- Do not be afraid to suggest that your friends and family join and collectively purchase larger equipment items such as stroller, baby swings, cribs, car seats, baby sling.

Parents of multiples need to find out as much as possible about the realities of parenting multiples before their babies arrive. You need to anticipate the impact of the babies on family life. You may need to prepare older siblings for the new arrivals, and you need to prepare for the fact there may be marital disruption as well. You can certainly learn a great deal by reading about parenting multiples, however, most parents still prefer to talk to other parents who have ‘been there and done that!’ Specialized multiple birth prenatal classes and local parents of multiples clubs are not everywhere but it is often possible to connect with other parents of multiples by contacting the national office.

It is interesting to note that the simplest “tips” can turn into almost insurmountable tasks in the sleep-deprived post-partum days. Tasks such as “putting a pin in your bra on the side of the breast you last fed from” or “put a sock over the crib post of the last baby you fed” can seem impossible to carry through. For these sleep-deprived early days, it is important to remember to simplify your life as much as possible with more important and necessary tasks. For example, you may not get the beds made each day but you and your babies need to eat properly and you will need to do some laundry. Simplify, Simplify, and Simplify!

Moral support is most important during these very intensive early weeks after birth - talking to people and having them reassure you there is a life after the first six months does make it easier to cope. Many parents of multiples eagerly do have a strong sense of obligation to support others who are expecting multiples. Total strangers may call up and ask: *“I’m expecting twins, triplets or more – do you have any advice for us?”*

### Advice from Parents with Older Multiples

- Take things day by day.
- They are not going to be babies forever.
- You are likely going to feel overworked at times – develop a positive attitude to life.
- Try to remain flexible.
- Keep your sense of humour!

### What is a Multiple Births Canada Chapter?

- A gathering of parents, expectant, new and experienced parents of multiples who support each other. Every member of every Chapter is a resource and peer support person for multiple birth families in Canada.
- What is the best thing a new/expectant Parent of multiples can receive: INFORMATION!

What are the main purposes of Chapters?

- To share experiences.
- To be open to all parents, expectant and new.
- To offer support, resources and information for expectant and new families of multiple births.
- To offer opportunities for new parents of multiples to share their experiences.

Most important aspects of belonging to a Chapter:

- The association and communication with other parents of multiples.
- You'll find other members have experienced situations you may encounter in raising your children.
- The benefit of sharing the unique experiences of parenting multiples – because they have been there!

What Do Chapters do?

- Assist parents in gaining insight to the unique physical and psychological aspects of raising multiples through speakers, panels and discussion groups.
- Through support resources, Chapters and parents become aware of the importance of individuality among multiples and also enlighten the view of the public.
- Chapters sponsor clothing sales, equipment re-sale, toy exchanges.
- Chapters hold social functions that include all family members.

### Preventing Preterm Birth

Your doctor will discuss some of the causes of preterm birth and ways to prevent it.

Preterm labour can happen to anyone. It is important to know what to do if it happens to you.

Know the Signs of Preterm Labour – *from Ottawa Hospital*

- Menstrual-like Cramps (constant or come and go, just above pubic bone)
- Low, Dull Backache (constant or comes and goes)
- Pressure (feels like the baby is pushing down; feels heavy)
- Abdominal Cramping (with or without diarrhea)
- Increase or change in vaginal discharge (mucousy, watery, light or bloody)
- Fluid leaking from vagina
- Feeling bad
- Uterine contractions that are 10 minutes apart or closer (may be painless)

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Tell someone you are having these signs and go to the hospital where you plan to give birth if you experience any of these symptoms (or the closest hospital if you are out of town). If you cannot go to the hospital or if you are not sure about what you are feeling, CALL the hospital birthing unit for advice.

### Delivery Day!

You are now home with your babies – your home will soon be invaded with visitors who want to “*ooh and ahh!*” and hold those “*little ones!*”.

Establish some house rules – quick!

- Guests make YOU a cup of tea.
- Guests not allowed for a visit unless they’ve *brought a casserole* with them!
- Pull up a seat; fold laundry, feed or bath a baby or two!
- Make sure your older children receive equal attention.

Caring for multiples is hard work, there is no denying that. You will experience lows and highs, but the highs are so high! Let yourself have some help while your multiples are little so that you will have the time to enjoy them! Multiple births are a very special experience and the babies only stay babies a very short time. You have been blessed!

### [We welcome you and your family to the Canadian Multiple Birth Family!](#)

PS... Have you contacted your nearest Multiple Birth Chapter – Contact us today!

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Sources: Chapter Newsletters, Parents of Multiples

#### **Recommended Sources of Information:**

La Leche League of Canada Referral Service

[www.lalecheleague.org](http://www.lalecheleague.org)

Lactation Consulting Services Canada

[www.breastfeedinghelp.ca](http://www.breastfeedinghelp.ca)

MBC Breastfeeding Peer Support Network