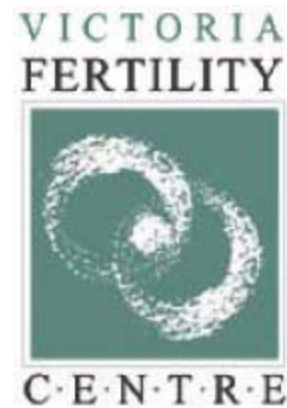


## Challenges of Parenting Multiples

To many couples who have travelled the road of infertility, the prospect of having a multiple pregnancy (in most cases twins) often seems exciting and even desirable. Most would be parents are, however, unaware of the increased risks that multiples pose to both Mum and babies. (Increased risks of miscarriage, premature delivery, toxemia, diabetes, cerebral palsy etc)

The psychological, social, and economic aspects of multiple pregnancies have not received the same amount of attention as the medical risks, but they are just as important to consider. If you are contemplating fertility treatment that puts you at risk for multiple pregnancy, or if you are currently pregnant with multiples, familiarizing yourself with these issues will help you make informed decisions regarding treatment, and, if necessary, prepare you for the unique challenges of multiple birth and parenting.



### PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

- Multiples may be hard to tell apart even if they are not identical. Help differentiate multiples by color coding their clothing or using bracelets that spell out their names. Soon you will be able to tell them apart by their individual characteristics and personalities.
- Parents may bond to multiples differently than to single-born children (singletons). You may find yourself preferring one infant more than the others, and your “favorite” may vary from week to week. Each infant will have different needs at different times, requiring differing amounts of attention.
- Managing the physical care of multiples is more difficult than managing singletons, especially in early infancy and childhood, and may lead to chronic stress and fatigue in the parents. Make sure that you reserve some time for you and your spouse as a couple, even if only for a few minutes a day. Remember to take care of yourself as well as your children.
- Older siblings may have difficulty adjusting to multiples, especially in competing for your attention. Try to be sensitive to the needs of your older children. Involve them in the pregnancy by taking them with you to doctor visits. Ask them to help choose items for the nursery. Asking them to be your “helper” and soliciting their opinions on the care and raising of the multiples will help them feel needed and loved.
- Some parents and schools prefer that multiples be in separate classes to promote individuality, particularly if the children have different abilities. However, some schools may not have enough classes to separate multiples, and logistical difficulties are magnified if the children need to be placed in different schools. Contact your local school system to ask about their policies on separating multiples, and work with your children’s teachers to provide the best environment for your children.
- Parents of multiples may feel socially isolated. Fatigue, lack of personal time, immersion in the care of the children, and financial difficulty are common reasons. It is easy to become engrossed in caring for multiples, but don’t abandon all of your

hobbies and interests. Instead, look for ways to be creative in balancing your needs with those of your children.

- Multiples often attract attention. This may have positive or negative consequences depending on the personalities of the parents and children and the nature of the attention. Plan ahead how you will respond to such attention. Role play, try different scenarios, and you will less likely be caught off guard. Keeping a sense of humor is important.
- Help from family and friends is often short-term. Parents of multiples usually need additional help, even if one parent stays at home. Premature infants require smaller, more frequent feedings than full-term infants and significant time for night feedings and diaper changes. Nighttime help may be necessary until the babies acquire reasonable sleeping habits. If you are unable to have someone in your home to help, work out a schedule so that neither parent does the bulk of the work. Sleep deprivation may cause fatigue and depression. Be aware of these signs in yourself or your spouse and work as a team to overcome these difficulties.

### **ECONOMIC ISSUES**

- The health care cost for delivery and newborn care for twins is four-fold higher when compared to a singleton birth. The increase is 12-fold higher for triplets. Examine your medical insurance to determine your out-of-pocket costs, if any, and plan ahead.
- Companies are not as willing to donate formula, diapers, etc., to parents of multiples as in the past. Because the number of multiples has increased, fewer families receive outside help today.
- The cost of caring for children with lifelong disabilities may be high. If any of your children has a disability, seek out government and private agencies as well as support groups in your area that may provide educational and financial assistance.
- The total cost of raising multiples is likely higher than the cost of raising the same number of singletons. Multiples preclude “hand-me-downs” from older siblings in sufficient quantity.

Cribs, car seats, high chairs, etc., must be purchased all at once, and the expenses are spread out over a shorter period of time. To save money, check with national retailers regarding discounts for multiples. Some stores give a 10% discount for twins, 20% discount for triplets, etc. Also check with consignment shops, which often sell new and used children’s items at a fraction of the cost.

### **SUMMARY**

Caring for multiples is a challenge. Try to join a support group and spend time with other parents of multiples to learn from their experiences. Ask your physician about local and national support groups. Seek out community resources in your area. The more informed you are, the better prepared you will be.

A good website for parents in British Columbia is [www.nursing.ubc.ca/pdfs/twinstripletsandmore.pdf](http://www.nursing.ubc.ca/pdfs/twinstripletsandmore.pdf)