

Being a Grandparent to Twins, Triplets or More

Hearing you're going to become a grandparent to twins, triplets or more can be a bit of a shock. Some grandparents say they didn't quite know how to respond when they got the news. Hearing that you're going to be a grandparent to one child can be life-changing. Becoming a grandparent to two (or even three or four) grandchildren at the same time can lead to significant lifestyle adjustments for you as well as the parents. It is common to have dozens of questions flying round your head, not least of all, "How will they cope?" Followed by, "How can I help them?"

Hopefully this factsheet will help. It has been put together using top tips from those who know - grandparents of twins, triplets and more!

A multiple birth pregnancy is different from a singleton pregnancy right from the beginning as it is classed as a 'higher risk pregnancy'. The number of hospital appointments the mother-to-be is required to attend is higher; this will include additional ultrasound scans, consultant and midwife appointments and women pregnant with multiples grow bigger faster and sooner than women expecting just one baby.

By the beginning of the third trimester (28 weeks) most mothers-to-be are the size that mothers of singletons are at 40 weeks. As a result they are often much more tired, and find everyday tasks physically more difficult and draining much earlier in their pregnancy.

With a multiple birth pregnancy there can often be heightened emotions and worries and anxieties about how they will cope when the babies arrive. Another important point to note is that many twins and triplets arrive early - over 50% before 37 weeks.

For more information about multiple birth pregnancies you can download Tamba's ['Healthy Multiple Pregnancy Guide'](#) from our website.

Knowing that grandparents are a key part of the essential multiple parents' tool

kit for coping, we asked our community of grandparents to pass on their knowledge and experience in order to help other expectant grandparents. Here are their top tips:

TOP TIPS FOR GRANDPARENTS OF TWINS TRIPLETS OR MORE

Tip 1 - Embrace and enjoy being a grandparent of multiples.

It is often said that becoming a grandparent is one of the joys of becoming older.

From our survey it was very clear that many respondents found being a grandparent of multiples very enjoyable. When asked how they felt about being a grandparent to multiples, responses included, "It's amazing," "It's a fantastic experience," "The love you feel is



Tamba surveyed more than 330 grandparents of multiples in 2015.

The findings confirmed that grandparents are the key to support for parents of multiples, both during and after the pregnancy.

overwhelming," "What a gift," and "The best experience ever - twice the work but twice the fun."

However not everyone embraces the challenge straight away. You may have worries about your own age, health and ability to cope, so take your time to work out how you can rise to the challenges ahead without over-committing yourself. As one grandparent said, "Don't be daunted by the prospect of twins - it's the most rewarding and joyful experience imaginable." And a grandparent to triplets said, "Although it was a very challenging time for us all, we got three times the joy."

Tip 2 - Help and support the parents.

Help comes in many forms and is often welcomed when offered, both during the pregnancy and once the babies arrive. The type of help offered can come in lots of different forms including helping care for older grandchildren, assistance with housework, shopping, cooking meals etc. As one grandparent told us, "Never underestimate how much you are needed during those first months. My daughter had a one year old too at the time the twins arrived. Without additional help I am sure she would have been vulnerable to postnatal depression. Help and support from us, I believe, avoided this happening."

Many new parents can find it hard to ask for help so remember to be practical and suggest ways you might be able to help. New parents don't always realise how helpful an extra pair of hands can be and some may be reluctant to ask. As one grandparent put it, "Parents need a lot of reassurance and support to keep morale high through the early difficult days and nights." Other advice from grandparents includes:

“The initial support is very important, more so than after having just singletons.”

“Offer as much help as you can to the new parents, making the odd meal, taking older siblings for sleepovers so mum / dad can spend time with twins to get a routine sorted, and let them have the odd lie in at weekends.”

“If I had that time again I would have gone down to stay and help out more often, and for longer, in order to try and stave off the 'emergencies'. In my case I was afraid to be seen as an interfering mother-in-law even though my daughter-in-law never ever made me feel that way. Perhaps having a good discussion well before the birth would have ensured that that didn't happen and more appropriate help would have been provided sooner.”

Often it can be difficult to juggle the help that you want to give with the help that is needed. Communication is really

important here and some parents can find it hard to ask for help. It can therefore be a bit of a learning curve for all concerned. This can be especially true when new parents are sleep-deprived and anxious.

It is a good idea to talk to the parents about the type of help they would appreciate and the type of help you are able and would like to provide, before the births. This will give you all an opportunity to find common ground before everyone starts getting exhausted and emotional.

If you are unsure of what to offer, or feel hurt because your offers are rejected, you may want to talk to someone neutral outside the family. Tamba's helpline 'Twinline' is useful for anyone involved in the care of multiples. Twinline is open 365 days a year from 10am to 1pm and 7pm to

10pm. Just call 0800 138 0509 to talk to one of our trained volunteers.

Tip 3 - Looking after twins, triplets or more is tiring and hard work.

There is no doubt that looking after twins, triplets or more can be hard work and will be very tiring. This is true not just for the parents, but also for the grandparents.

You may feel you want to help your son or daughter by babysitting their multiples, but at the same time be worried about how you will cope with the work, and maybe how you will cope physically with the demands.

Some grandparents offered their views on the reality of caring for their multiple-birth grandchildren:

“I found it difficult to take twin toddlers out and about because I found that whilst attending to one twin the other twin would escape.”

“The main difficulty now that I'm older is picking them up. Their Mum makes juggling two toddlers seem easy but I do struggle.”

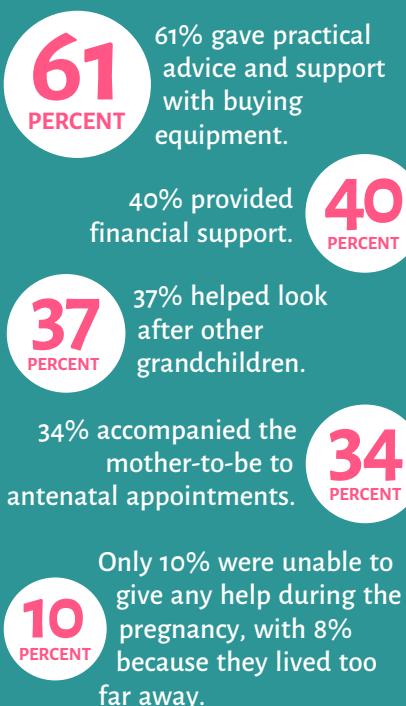
“Get in lots of rest when at your house, so you're able to help fully when you are at her house. You will be exhausted after a day at their's.”

The grandparents we spoke to gave some useful advice for how to cope with the difficulty that caring for twins, triplets or more can cause. In particular they emphasised the importance of setting boundaries and not letting yourself struggle too much, so that the help and support you give actually lasts longer into the future because you are not overwhelmed or too tired out.

“Do not take on too much. Then you can be realistic in the amount of care you can give your grandchildren over the years ahead. Ongoing support is vital.”

“Be clear about what you are able to offer, especially if you have other commitments e.g. work or if you have older parents to care for.”

In our survey, grandparents of multiples were asked what help they were able to give their sons or daughters before the birth:



(Survey respondents could choose more than one answer for this question)

Tip 4 - Respect the parents' wishes.

Some Grandparents told us they had very strong views about how things should be done, especially as parenting will have changed since they were a parent. Attempts at providing support then became charged with emotion for all concerned, especially when opinions differ significantly.

The advice from our grandparent community is that it is vital to focus on the needs of all the children first and to provide support to the parents by following their lead on the way they want to parent their children. Even if this means the grandparents have to learn new ways to do things. As one grandparent said in their survey response "Don't ever suggest how they are doing things is wrong; they will find their feet. Do things how they ask you to, not how you think it should be done. They are their children, not yours. You can only advise."

It may be useful to read some of the resources available to new parents, to familiarise yourself with what the current trends and recommendations are surrounding pregnancy, birth and parenting generally as well as specifically multiples. There is lots of information on the Tamba website.

It is likely there will be many changes since you were in their position, but also many similarities as well. The chances are the biggest differences will be to do with their multiple birth status and this will be a steep and new learning curve for the whole family, parents and grandparents.

Whilst you may be eager to spend lots of time with your new grandchildren and want to help out, try and remember that the new family also need some time to work out a routine for themselves. Again good communication is vital. Another tip from your fellow grandparents is that



when you do help out it is important to aim to try and stick to the routine the parents have put in place.

“Give as much help as you can and stand back to give the new parents some family time.”

“Be prepared, both for the added work but also for the parent's anxiety over their multiples getting out of their routine.”

Grandparents of multiples were asked what Tamba resources they had used:

18 PERCENT 18% of grandparents had visited Tamba's website.

7% had visited the Tamba Facebook page. **7 PERCENT**

7 PERCENT 7% had read some of Tamba's booklets.

5% had attended one of our Practical Preparing for Parenthood regional seminars. **5 PERCENT**

1 PERCENT Only 1% had phoned 'Twinline' - Tamba's telephone helpline - available to anyone caring for multiples.

(Survey respondents could choose more than one answer for this question)

Tip 5 - Treat each child as an individual.

Arguably one of the most important roles a grandparent can have is simply to spend time with your grandchildren. This is especially true as they grow older and begin to display their own individual personalities, strengths, likes and dislikes. As some of our grandparents said, "Get to know them

as individuals, not as one of a pair, from the very start," and "Treat them as individuals; don't expect them to be the same and like the same things and want to do the same things just because they are twins."

Developing individuality is a very important aspect of personal development for twins, triplets or more and there are lots of ways grandparents can help the family to achieve this. Take a look at the resources on our website to support the development of individuality in multiples.

The care of twins, triplets or more often focuses on a routine simply to get everything done, but this can leave less time to tend to each child's individual differences. This is especially true for families with twins, triplets or more, because their parents usually have limited time available to give each child individual attention.

As a grandparent you can really help to ensure that each child gets the individual attention they need. You can get to have fun without worrying (as much) about the mundane tasks that the parents face every day. By giving each baby attention you can get to know their individual personalities, likes and dislikes.

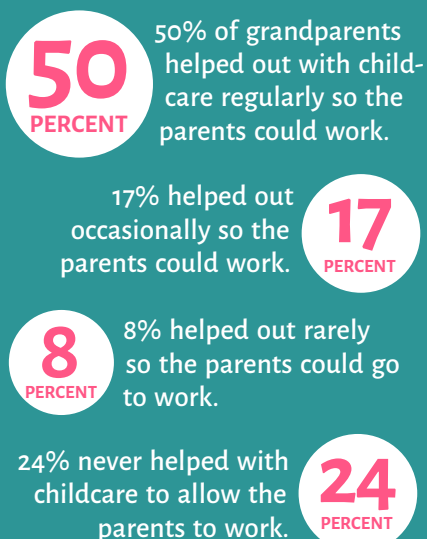
Here's what a couple grandparents had to say about this:

“Try to have both grandparents around when babysitting as the children are individuals and often want to do separate things.”

“They are very much individual personalities. Recently we have been having one at a time for sleepovers. We feel this has benefitted everyone - one less at home and, for the child, grandma's and grandpa's undivided attention.”

However, in all the joy of the new arrivals it is very important to remember any older siblings in the family. They suddenly go from being the centre of attention to having to share the attention with not one but two or more new brothers or sisters. Grandparents can be a huge help in this area of family life too.

Grandparents of multiples were asked if they helped out with childcare so the parents could go to work:



Tip 6 - Stay calm!

New babies can create stress in any household and the arrival of several new babies at once can be even more stressful.

Our grandparent community told us that the best way of dealing with the added stress and workload that twins, triplets or more often bring with them, is to try very hard to remain calm. Whilst this might be easier said than done, it is a tip repeated often by grandparents and parents.

Being patient with yourself is vital, as often even routine tasks with multiples can take longer than expected. Most situations, no matter how overwhelming, can seem a little easier if you pause to take a deep breath, step back and calm down.

Tips from fellow grandparents include looking at the 'problem' logically and as a 'challenge'. They advise dividing tasks into smaller chunks and doing them in order of priority, one at a time.

The ability to stay calm in a crisis not only helps you to cope with caring for your grandchildren, but can be invaluable when the overtired parents

are having a particularly difficult time. It's also not only the parents who can pick up on, and take some comfort from, a more relaxed atmosphere. The babies will sense this too and will hopefully be a little calmer themselves.

“They're just children. Don't be scared by the fact there's more than one. One at a time works just fine.”

“Keep calm when they all cry at once and try to stick with the routine.”

“Try not to worry too much, or if you do, don't let the parents know.”

Tip 7 - Be Organised

One of the best ways to make sure you have the ability to remain calm is to be prepared for any eventuality, and this begins with good organisation.

Several of our grandparents said to 'baby proof everything!' And try to create a sort of home from home environment at your home so that when your grandchildren visit, you don't have to worry about things getting broken, or them getting hurt.

Plan ahead and prepare for any possibilities that could cause a stressful situation. For example, keep a few spare nappies or a change of clothes for the babies that you can whip out in an emergency. The same tip is useful if you are visiting them or going to stay.

Grandparents told us that packing spare clothes, comfy clothes and shoes and other useful items you might need helped reduce their stress levels. Being in a household with two or more tiny babies who feed and sleep in two to three hourly cycles can be tiring for all concerned so try to rest up before you go and visit because you may get only limited rest or sleep once you're there.

Here are a few of tips from fellow grandparents:

“Keep all your essentials packed in a case. Add clothes for comfort when you are going to help out. Remember your chargers for phones and cameras as theirs might be run down.”

“Routine - ask parents to write down as far as possible the routine they are trying to follow with the babies. Make notes of medication amounts, telephone contacts etc.”

“Be prepared for the unexpected! Be organised - have everything you need to hand and try to enlist the help and support of friends and family.”

Tip 8 - Look after yourself.

When you become a grandparent, you will obviously be significantly older than when you became a parent. Whilst it is natural to want to help the parents as much as you can, it is important that you acknowledge your personal limitations and remember to look after yourself as well.

Young children are full of energy and with twins, triplets or more this is multiplied! Feedback from our grandparent community told us that they often found it tiring looking after their multiple grandchildren. Some found that this was compounded by other personal issues such as ill health, or having the responsibilities of other commitments such as work or elderly parents to care for.

Being clear about how much you can realistically help is vital, and don't be afraid to say if you need to slow things down a little or enlist an extra pair of hands to help you out when caring for your grandchildren. Whilst the new parents will appreciate any help you can give them, they will not want it to be at your own detriment. So try not to let your own day-to-day chores and important tasks such as appointments go undone or unattended.

By pacing yourself realistically you can make sure you are around to help and in good health for as long as

67% of grandparents who responded to our survey had other grandchildren as well as their multiples.

possible so you can carry on with your key role as grandparent to multiples for many years to come.

Here are some tips from other grandparents:

“ Try to be as fit and healthy as possible - you will need the energy!”

“ Just hope you are a grandparent at an earlier age because you need heaps of energy, and at 65 years I am worried I will not have the energy for too many years help.”

“ Make sure you still reserve some time for yourselves.”

“ Be clear about what you are able to offer, especially if you have other commitments e.g. work or older parents to care for.”

Tip 9 - Be flexible and open-minded.

Flexibility and open mindedness were skills that our grandparents thought were important. You may already have an idea about what life with multiples might be like but reality can be very different. Every child and every family is unique.

Sometimes the parents might have to make choices which aren't the path you would have personally chosen. Many multiples come with additional considerations and situations that will require difficult decisions parents of singletons might not encounter. These can include decisions during pregnancy, premature delivery of the babies and even hospital stays.

Once the babies arrive families can find that they become isolated because of difficulties leaving the house with more than one baby or they can face financial and work difficulties due to the incredibly high cost of childcare for two or more young children at once.

As the grandparent you may have to sit back and watch your children struggle and make difficult decisions. An important role is to listen to their concerns and then support whatever path they choose and be ready to help in whatever way you can, with whatever situation arises.

“ I really was open to anything happening and took it a day at a time.”

“ Be prepared for a steep learning curve.”

“ It was a learning process for me as we went along, which was not a problem. Childcare has moved on in so many ways.”

“ Just be ready to help wherever needed but allow the parents to do as much as they want and can do for themselves.”

Tip 10 - Be prepared to learn.

From the moment you find out your son or daughter is expecting twins, triplets or more, there will be a continual opportunity for learning. If you try and embrace this new situation, new identity and new role in your child's life, it will make for a most rewarding experience.

From a 'high risk' pregnancy, caring for two or more babies, new childcare practices, what the role of a grandparent means to you and your family, down to literal things like medical terms and procedures for premature babies, you will be learning and adapting to this unpredictable life changing event.

Many things you will find you are learning by experience, right alongside your own child. Other things you may have to sit back and let your child, (or another grandparent or a doctor / nurse) teach you.

Here's what other grandparents had to say about their learning journey on the road to becoming a multiples grandparent:

“ Your own experience of being a mother of 'singletons' is hardly ever going to translate to twins! That's ok. You're all learning together. You're there to support and encourage and listen.”

“ Realise, if premature, that you are actually getting them to their expected birth date and not to worry about them being a little behind in their development.”

“ It's only when you meet a new situation on a daily basis that you always wish you knew more than you did! I was glad that my daughter made me aware of TAMBA and pointed me towards sources of information. We were both learning at the same time”



HEAR WHAT OTHER GRANDPARENTS OF MULTIPLES HAVE TO SAY

To accompany this factsheet, Tamba have put together a compilation of stories from other grandparents of twins, triplets or more. 'Grandparents' Personal Stories' features lots of experiences from grandparents written in their own words, and includes lots more useful advice.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Also accompanying this factsheet are Tamba's FAQs for grandparents of twins, triplets or more. It features detailed answers to frequently asked questions.

Thank you for downloading our factsheet. Feedback from our user community is very important to Tamba. Please complete this survey to help us continue to ensure we meet the needs of our community:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Tambafactsheetfeedback>