

The Delehoy Twins – a (not so) brief narrative of how we prepared for and survived the first year.

As a Scientist, the first thing I did after discovering we were expecting not one but two sweet bundles of joy was devour every bit of information I could get my hands on. As I'm sure many of you are aware, there is no dearth of information available in books, on the internet, from friends etc. It was hard to know exactly what to prepare for as far as gestating two humans at the same time, labor and delivery, what to purchase (what did I really need two of anyway?!?) and how to handle those first few months as new parents. I've broken my main thoughts into three sections for ease of reading, namely: Baking, Deliverance and 'How not to drown in babies'.

Baking: As I mentioned above, I spent the majority of my free time during my pregnancy reading and trying to cram every bit of information into my brain that I could. I can honestly say I only ended up using maybe 15% of the information I read, but I was comforted knowing as much as possible. Here's the helpful 15% in bulleted form.

- Have a game plan just in case you end up on bed rest, early labor/delivery, pre-eclampsia or any of the other number of things that are so much more likely during a twin pregnancy. I was fortunate to not need mine, but I had a plan just in case. Also, if you're working and planning on using maternity leave it's a great idea to talk to your HR representative to discuss how bed rest might affect the time you have off.
- Take a class. I was fortunate enough to join a class called 'Expecting Multiples' offered through the Women's Clinic in Fort Collins. It was a wonderful class specifically targeted towards multiple pregnancies that focused on the things that can be expected during pregnancy and delivery. There are some important differences between singleton and multiple pregnancies that were highlighted in this class. This was also a great place to meet some other families expecting multiples around the same time as us. To this day I have kept in touch with these other MoMs and it's great to see our twins growing up together!
- If you're going to have a baby shower, do so before week 28 of gestation. This was a great piece of advice from a seasoned twin Mom. Not only is there a potential for early delivery with twins, but the last trimester can be extremely uncomfortable. The last thing I wanted to do at 34-36 weeks was sit and entertain my friends and family (even if it was a party for me). At that point all I wanted to do was nap all day and itch my belly. The nice thing about an earlier baby shower is it allows you plenty of time to get things in place, exchange unwanted items and buy what you didn't receive before you get too tired or too big to do so. I went to Babies R Us at 36 weeks to get a few last minute things and not only was I exhausted after 15 minutes in the store, but I'm pretty sure I scared the pants off some of the other less pregnant ladies in the store who were likely convinced they would look like me in a few months ;)
- Make a reasonable list of what you'll need. I got a great list from another twin MoM in the club. We don't have a huge house so we definitely did not want two of everything if we didn't need it. I'm happy to share the list with anyone interested.
- Get the nursery and your hospital bag ready by 30 weeks. Once you have all the goods from the shower and the store, get everything set up and ready. Again this is because the wee ones might make an early appearance and also because you may not have the energy to do much later in the pregnancy. I have very fond memories of nagging my husband and watching him struggle to get everything assembled within my timeline.

- Finally, enjoy the pregnancy as much as possible. Oh the kicks, hiccups, expanding belly, ultrasounds and elastic-waist pants! As a first time Mom, I was enamored with all the beauty of pregnancy. Sure there are a lot of less than stellar things that you could focus on, but there is so much more that is just awe inspiring. You are growing multiple humans!!! That is just glorious, don't let the stress and worry detract from all of the beauty.

Deliverance: I was wonderfully fortunate to go to 37 weeks and 5 days gestation with my girls. I was totally prepared for a potential pre-term delivery and shocked when I made it so far. I suddenly became pre-eclamptic 36 hours prior to my scheduled C-section and was wheeled into the operating room 90 minutes after calling my doctor to report my headache and high blood pressure. It's funny that when I had finally become resigned to making it full term, my body decided to pull tricks on me.

- An inordinate number of multiple pregnancies will be delivered via C-section. The class I took gave me an exact percentage, but I would only be guessing if I tried to remember that now. One of my girls was nicely nestled with her hinny blocking the exit the whole pregnancy, so we had plenty of notice that a C-section was our only option. But as you prepare for delivery, be sure to understand both delivery methods just in case.
- A C-section may not be as bad as you think. The room is cold, there are a LOT of people in the room and the whole experience is oddly surreal. I tried to just stay focused on the fact that I was going to get two babies out of this deal.
- There are potential complications from any surgery including C-sections. I had a few, and I don't want to go into them in an effort to not scare anyone. I just want you to know that I had complete trust in my Obstetricians and they made the best decisions for me and my babies. Finding a good team of Doctors you can trust is key! Also, this was another time that my extensive research helped me, I was totally prepared for my complications when they arose so I wasn't taken off guard. Honestly, if anyone was going to have complications I was much happier that they were mine and not one of my girls!
- Pain management is necessary. The hospital staff will only offer you pain medications that are safe for nursing mothers (if you choose to nurse), so do yourself a favor and stay on top of it. You will sleep better and have more energy for a faster recovery if you stay comfortable. My greatest pain was caused by the air that was trapped in my abdominal cavity that pushed at nerves that resulted in neck and shoulder pain. This did not pop up in my reading and I was surprised at how intense it was. The incision was nothing compared to my neck and shoulders!
- The hospital staff are your friends. When asked, they moved us to a bigger room to accommodate two bassinets, my husband, myself and our plethora of friends and family that paraded through the room for four days. The sweet nurses offered to take the babies for a few hours so we could get uninterrupted sleep. They also got us lots of free swag for the girls. The lactation consultants came every day to help us figure out some latch issues. If you have a problem, yo they solve it!
- Babies loose approximately 10% of their body weight after birth. When your babies are lower birth weight they watch them like hawks! Our girls were both 5 lbs, so by the time we were ready to leave they were under that and seemed so teeny. There was definite push for us to supplement the girls with formula to get them to gain faster before heading home, but you can say no. We asked for donor breast milk instead from the Mother's Milk Bank Program (great program, look it up!).

Then they send you home. And you're parents. And you're alone. And it is both terrifying and awesome at the same time.

How not to drown in babies: Don't be fooled in those first 4 days or so after you get home from the hospital. They sleep all the time, constantly, and you find yourself thinking 'This isn't so bad...'. But it's only a phase and then that first growth spurt hits and it's on for the next 6 months! Here are a few tips for those first few months. Again, as with everything above, this is just what worked for us and certainly not a manual by any means.

- Have a station set up in the room where you spend the majority of your time where you have clothes, diapers, changing pad, burp cloths, pacifiers etc. We bought this great pack'n'play that had a changing table to the side and a set of shelves. During the day we used that as central station so we weren't going up and down stairs all day.
- Take all the help you can get. I found the greatest help was the meals delivered from friends and family. It was great to focus on getting the babies taken care of all day without worrying about cooking also. We had a strict no visitors policy for the first 5 days so my husband and I could get some quality time with the babies. During that time, we had people drop things by, but didn't really entertain.
- Don't be afraid of leaning on little crutches that may make your life easier. The baby swing, pacifiers, a ceiling fan, white noise machine...whatever. Some days you just need things to be a little easier, so do what works for you and don't worry what anyone else has told you.
- The first 6 weeks of nursing is the hardest! SO HARD. There is pain, frustration, doubt, fear, impatience and heartache. I can honestly say it was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. But seriously, if you can make it passed that point it gets so much easier. The folks at Wee Steps can be helpful, but what I found most helpful were the scales they have available for you to use on a drop in basis. I stopped by every 3-5 days those first few weeks to ensure the girls were gaining well and give myself some peace of mind that I was producing enough for them. I could write a book on all the things I learned nursing twins, but there just isn't enough space here. I'm always happy to tell anyone what I learned, so if you're interested just ask.
- Sleep/Eat schedules are difficult to set with two individuals. I always kept my girls on the same schedule, if one was up to eat, they both got up to eat. This kept my life in a semblance of order that worked best for me. Because I nursed, sometimes they were hungry every 1.5 hours and occasionally would stretch to 3 hours. I just kind of had to follow their cues and meet their needs (I also found this to be helpful to ensure my body produced enough for them). But if one woke up night or day before her sister, I fed them both at the same time so I had the best chance for sleeping, cleaning, errands etc. I did this until about 5 months, at which point I started letting my twin B sleep through the night (she was probably ready to do so around 3.5-4 months but I was loathe to not feed her and potentially have to get up again).
- Sleep/Nap schedules are tough with two. I shed more than a few tears and grew some new gray hairs sleep training my twins. This is one area to hit the internet and the books. I found the 4-6 month age to be the most difficult time of the first 12 months with twins specifically because of this issue.

- Surprisingly enough, travel with 3 month olds was WAY easier than 6 month olds which were both WAY easier than travelling with 12 month olds! A story for another time, but this was shocking to me as I was terrified when we travelled the first time. Eh, hindsight.
- Finally – The best piece of advice I received was to that each stage has great things and not so great things. If you love something that they're doing at the moment cherish it because soon they'll change. Similarly, if you are about to rip your eyebrows out because they won't nap even though their exhausted just know that this too will pass soon enough. I've been amazed at how much my girls have changed over the last 20 months.

I hope some of this has been helpful. I can certainly say that the majority of success I've enjoyed has been assisted by the kind, patient advice given by other MoMs I've met in the club. Feel free to ask anything and everything! We are happy to help in any way we can.

Cheers,

Jillian Delehoy