

# Double Duty

The joys and challenges of back-to-back babies

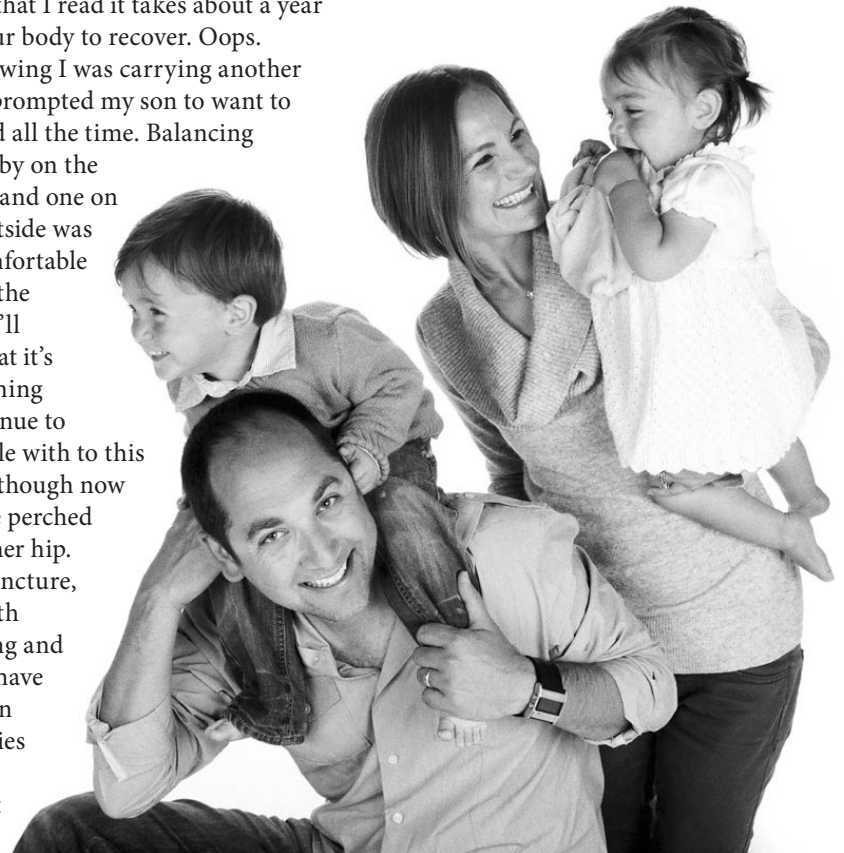
I just went into my 15-month-old daughter's room to find that she'd thrown her beloved lamb out of the crib, ripped off her diaper and peed all over the bedding. As I fought the bumpers and mattress to get the sheets off, my 2-year-old screamed from the room next door that he wasn't going to nap. Yes, life with two babies who are 15 months apart is seldom boring.

I remember before my husband and I had kids, sitting on the couch and remarking, "After we have kids everything will be so exciting between trips to the zoo, days at the beach and play dates in the park." Oh, it's exciting all right, although no one warned me that the excitement included packing multiple snacks, remembering diapers, wipes and extra clothes and charting timelines as to hopefully avoid meltdowns.

I got pregnant with my daughter when my son was almost six months old. Yes, we planned it. No, we didn't know it would happen that quickly. Watching other parents struggle to conceive again and having experienced some of our own, we decided we'd take

the next child whenever it decided to grace us. After all, she wouldn't arrive for nine months and while pregnant with my first, I'd never felt better. Maybe I'd get lucky twice! Well, that didn't turn out to be the case, but it wasn't until I was pregnant again that I read it takes about a year for your body to recover. Oops.

Knowing I was carrying another child prompted my son to want to be held all the time. Balancing one baby on the inside and one on the outside was uncomfortable to say the least. I'll add that it's something I continue to struggle with to this day, although now they're perched on either hip. Acupuncture, strength training and Advil have all been remedies I've sought out



for the inevitable shoulder pain, but it's improving on its own. I'm assuming my muscles contorted in such a way that took me down a notch on the evolutionary chain, but made my quest to be a mama Sherpa possible.

Our daughter arrived two weeks before her due date. I was so nervous about my son's reaction, I did everything friends, experts and practical strangers told me to do from buying presents "from the baby," to reading him books about siblings to talking about the wonderful changes that were about to transpire. However, after looking at her and lifting my gown to check out my deflated stomach, he smiled and asked to go play.

A friend of mine, who is a twin, always believed people were better off coming into the world with a "partner." Although the days are challenging, my kids truly are partners in every sense of the word. My daughter worships my son and has learned to do things at 15 months that she probably never would have otherwise. For example, she's further along with potty training than he is, but that could partially be because she excitedly anticipates that he'll bring her books to read as she sits there patiently. He also delights in finding her toys, telling her she has "nice hair," and giving her goodnight kisses. Of course, he still tells her to stop singing so he can hear his CDs, slaps her hand when she picks up his favorite giraffe and believes his "turn" at everything should last three times as long as hers, but when she coos and he tells me that it means she wants an apple, a blanket or a nap I can't help but smile.

Someone once told me that with kids, the days go slowly but the years fly by. I guess that's the paradox of parenthood. While I complain that it hurts my neck to carry them both at the same time, knowing I won't be able to do that forever also hurts my heart. ❖

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*Freelance writer Elise Edwards is an award-winning writer, producer, anchor and reporter for CNN. Elise is the mother of a 1-year-old girl and 2-year-old boy. Photo of the author and her family appears courtesy of Classic Kids Photography.*