

babytalk



STRAIGHT TALK FOR NEW MOMS

Dr. Sears

8 secrets of happy babies

how to save
your child's life

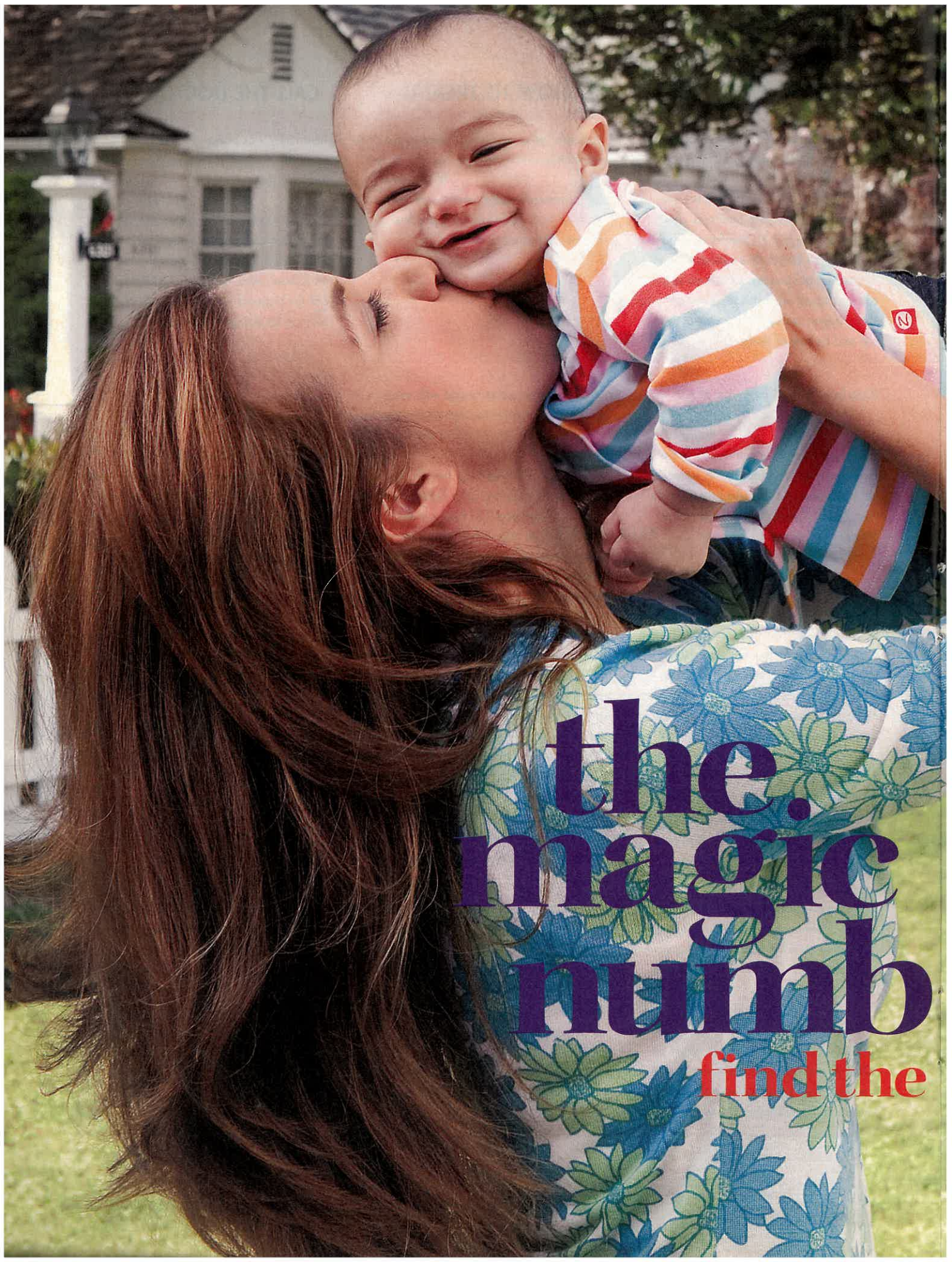
Plus baby
advocates
we love

Our 1st ever Golden
Pacifier Awards!

the health
threat new
moms miss

1, 2, 4?

Find out how many
kids are right for you



**the.
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find the



er: family size that's right for you

by Kyle Spencer photographs by Katrina Dickson

Life with a baby is full of decisions:

breast or bottle, work or stay at home, use the pacifier or ditch it. But then there's that other decision, the really big one lurking in the back of every harried new mom's head: Could we, should we, do we want to have another?

Family size is an extremely personal decision, of course. A mom who always dreamed of a big family can be overwhelmed by the demands of a single child; a mom who grew up as an only might be determined to give her child the siblings she missed. "The number of kids you have affects your marriage, living arrangement, car choice, travel options—everything," says Susan Newman, Ph.D., author of *Parenting an Only Child*. Here, the experts weigh in about the pluses and pitfalls of one, two, three, or more children—and reveal how it can change your life now and down the road.

ONE: Cozy and convenient

NOW: With only one little person in your midst, your child-rearing years will be less chaotic and less exhausting. One means fewer strains on your bank account, your body, and your house. (You, mother of one, will be done scraping squashed Cheerios off furniture a lot sooner than your friends with more kids. Tempting, isn't it?) A one-child family is a good choice for dual-career couples, those feeling financially pinched by the cost of baby number one, and anyone who doesn't want to convert their dining room into a playroom. And avid travelers take note: One is for you. "It's hard to pick up and take off when you have four children and sixteen goldfish," Newman points out.

What's more, having an only child no longer carries the stigma that it once did, when larger families were the norm. Onlies get more one-on-one time with Mom and Dad and all their focus. The intensity of that bond can be wonderful, experts say, but it can also be stressful for both the only and his parents. That's because there are no siblings to buffer parental expectations, says Adele Faber, a parenting expert and the coauthor of the best-selling guide *Siblings Without Rivalry*. Other risks: Onlies can become isolated and, yes, in some cases, a bit self-centered. To combat this, "have other kids around on a regular basis," advises Caroline Hall, a Los Angeles mom of a 1½-year-old girl.

LATER: Want a high achiever? Several studies have shown that, on average, only children produce greater professional and academic achievements than later-born children from bigger families. But beware, some adult onlies say that their

successes can seem less sweet without siblings to share the journey. Others say they regret being the only one to take care of aging parents and envy friends whose adult sibs helped them navigate life's ups and downs. But that minor glitch, many say, is worth the extra-close bond they have with Mom and Dad. "The sunlight shone on me all the time," says only child Daphne Uviller, the coeditor of a collection of essays titled *Only Child: Writers on the Singular Joys and Solitary Sorrows of Growing Up Solo*. "And that love brought me a real sense of peace."

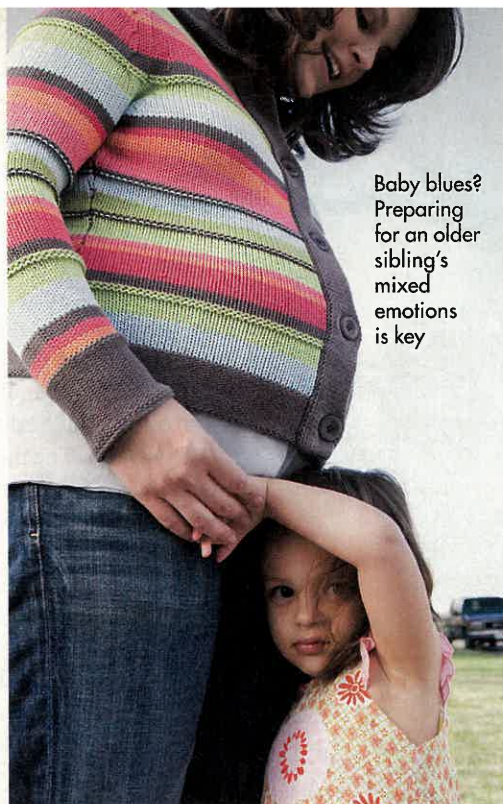
TWO: Double duty

NOW: With the American family averaging 1.9 kids, choosing two means you'll have a lot to talk about with your neighbors—many of whom will also be tackling two car seats and two budding personalities. If your dynamic duo is close in age, be warned. "The early years are tough," says Geraldine Kerr, a family therapist and mother in Morristown, New Jersey. First, you have to deal with your eldest's potentially unnerving reaction to the arrival of a new baby. (Books abound on how to ease the transition, but many moms say being well prepared for your firstborn's mixed emotions is key.) Then there's the logistics. Bedtime and mealtime can be challenging—and double diaper duty is, well, a lot of diapers.

But when your kids start to play together, which begins to happen when the youngest is about 2½, the benefits make it worth it. "Watching your kids play together is a very special feeling for a parent," says Caroline Clauss-Ehlers, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and assistant professor in the department of educational psychology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. And it means Mom and Dad no longer have to do all the entertaining. Of course, the fighting will start then, too.

If your two tykes are spaced three or more years apart, other challenges await you—including the organizational Olympics of two different nap schedules, bedtime routines, meal plans, and gear needs. Many experts contend, though, that a three-year gap is the best way to ward off sibling rivalry. Either way, says Clauss-Ehlers, "a sibling means an ally, a buddy, and a lifelong playmate."

LATER: Adult twos can be adept at resolving conflict at work and in their marriages. "As kids they really had to work things out," offers Faber. After all, there were no other siblings waiting in the wings to turn to if they didn't.



Baby blues? Preparing for an older sibling's mixed emotions is key

And because they clocked so much time without the distraction of other sibs, many twos say they share a close bond with their sole sibling. For you, two adult children means that you'll likely have more grandkids and more people to care for you as you age.

THREE OR MORE: Bigger's better

NOW: Moms with big families say more kids equals more fun. Of course, it also means more chaos and a lot more work. (Need calm and order? A large family's not for you.) Big families are expensive, and they take their toll on mothers who spend more years pregnant and breastfeeding than moms who opt for smaller clans.

Dads pay a price, too. When the kids outnumber the parents, it's no longer an adult household with kids. "The children become a little community of their own," says Kerr. Fans of big families say it's all worth it—they love the camaraderie among sibs. "We experience tremendous pleasure when we see them teach, compliment, or console each other," says Mary Cohen, a mother of three girls in Atlanta. What's more, new research is showing that siblings play an important role in their brothers' and sisters' development. One recent study showed that college students with older siblings of the opposite sex were more socially adept with opposite-sex peers than those who didn't have an opposite-sex sibling at home. Other studies have shown that—for better or worse—siblings really rub off on each other when it comes to long-term goals, values, and behavior.

LATER: If you dream of spending your golden years with the young'uns, having a large family means you can do just that, says family psychologist Kevin Leman, Ph.D., the author of *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are*. With three or more growing families to choose from, you can relive the best parts of raising kids without the seemingly endless hard work. Other pluses: Your adult kids will always have each other to share life's highs and lows. And when you, their deserving parent, becomes the one who needs taking care of, they'll have each other to share the load. What will be your biggest challenge? Distributing your time and energy equally among grandkids. ●

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