

# Safe Sleep For Your Baby



**SAFE TO SLEEP**

**Reduce the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Other Sleep-Related Causes of Infant Death**



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child  
Health and Human Development



***This is what a safe sleep environment looks like.  
It has no bumpers, pillows, blankets, or toys.***

# What is SIDS?

SIDS is the sudden, unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year of age that doesn't have a known cause even after a complete investigation.

Each year in the United States, thousands of babies die suddenly and unexpectedly. These deaths are called SUID (pronounced SOO-idd), which stands for "Sudden Unexpected Infant Death."

SUID includes all unexpected deaths: those without a clear cause, such as SIDS, and those from a known cause, such as suffocation. One-half of all SUID cases are SIDS. Many unexpected infant deaths are accidents, but a disease or something done on purpose can also cause a baby to die suddenly and unexpectedly.

Sleep-related causes of infant death are those linked to how or where a baby sleeps or slept. They are due to accidental causes, such as: suffocation; entrapment, when baby gets trapped between two objects, such as a mattress and wall, and can't breathe; or strangulation, when something presses on or wraps around baby's neck, blocking baby's airway. These deaths are not SIDS.

## Fast facts about SIDS:

- SIDS is the leading cause of death in babies 1 month to 1 year of age.
- Most SIDS deaths happen when babies are between 1 month and 4 months of age.



## What should I know about SIDS?

### ■ We have made great progress in reducing SIDS.

Since awareness campaigns that stressed back sleeping for babies started in 1994, the SIDS rate in the United States has dropped by 50 percent. This decreased rate equals thousands of babies' lives and is a result of parents and caregivers placing babies on their backs to sleep.

- In 1994, 4,073 babies died from SIDS and only 27 percent of babies slept on their backs. In 2009, 2,226 babies died from SIDS and 74 percent of babies slept on their backs.
- In 1995, 77 American Indian/Alaska Native babies died from SIDS. In 2009, 52 American Indian/Alaska Native babies died from SIDS.
- Despite these decreases, American Indian/Alaska Native babies are at higher risk for SIDS, based on their numbers within the U.S. population, than are Hispanic American, Asian American, or white babies.

- **Babies sleep safest on their backs.** Babies who sleep on their backs are much less likely to die of SIDS than are babies who sleep on their stomachs or sides.
- **Every sleep time counts.** Babies should sleep on their backs for all sleep times—for naps and at night. Babies who are used to sleeping on their backs but who are then placed on their stomachs to sleep, like for a nap, are at very high risk of SIDS.
- **Sleep surface matters.** Babies who sleep *on a soft surface*, such as an adult bed, or *under a soft covering*, such as a soft blanket or quilt, are more likely to die of SIDS or suffocation.



***Always place your baby on his or her back to sleep, for naps and at night.***

# What can I do to lower my baby's risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death?

There is no sure way to prevent SIDS, but parents and caregivers can take these steps to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death:

- **Always place a baby on his or her back to sleep, for naps and at night, to reduce the risk of SIDS.** The back sleep position is the safest position for all babies, including preterm babies. Keep in mind that every sleep time counts.



***Room sharing—keeping your baby's sleep area in the same room where you sleep—reduces the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.***



- **Use a firm sleep surface, covered by a fitted sheet, to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.**

Firm sleep surfaces

can include safety-approved\* cribs, bassinets, and portable play areas. Do not use a car seat, carrier, swing, or similar product as baby's everyday sleep area. Never place baby to sleep on soft surfaces, such as on a couch or sofa, pillows, quilts, sheepskins, or blankets.

\* For information on crib safety, contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772 or <http://www.cpsc.gov>

- **Your baby should not sleep in an adult bed, on a couch, or on a chair alone, with you, or with anyone else.** Room sharing—keeping baby's sleep area in the same room where you sleep—reduces the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. If you bring your baby into your bed to breastfeed, make sure to put him or her back in a separate sleep area in your room, such as a safety-approved\* crib, bassinet, or portable play area, when you are finished.

- **Keep soft objects, toys, and loose bedding out of your baby's sleep area to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.** Don't use pillows, blankets, quilts, sheepskins, or crib bumpers anywhere in your baby's sleep area. Evidence does not support using crib bumpers to prevent injury. In fact, crib bumpers can cause serious injuries and even death. Keeping them out of baby's sleep area is the best way to avoid these dangers.
- **To reduce the risk of SIDS, women should:**
  - Get regular health care during pregnancy, and
  - Not smoke, drink alcohol, or use illegal drugs during pregnancy or after the baby is born.
- **To reduce the risk of SIDS, do not smoke during pregnancy, and do not smoke or allow smoking around your baby.**
- **Breastfeed your baby to reduce the risk of SIDS.** Breastfeeding has many health benefits for mother and baby.



***Dress your baby in light sleep clothing to prevent overheating.***





- **Give your baby a dry pacifier that is not attached to a string for naps and at night to reduce the risk of SIDS.**

But don't force the baby to use it. If the pacifier falls out of baby's mouth during sleep, there is no need to put the pacifier back in. Wait until baby is used to breastfeeding before trying a pacifier.

If you bring your baby into your bed to breastfeed, make sure to put him or her back in a separate sleep area in your room, such as a safety-approved\* crib (see page 5), when you are finished.

- **Do not let your baby get too hot during sleep.**

Dress your baby in light sleep clothing or in no more than one layer more of clothing than an adult would wear to be comfortable. Keep the room at a temperature that is comfortable for an adult.

- **Follow health care provider guidance on your baby's vaccines and regular health checkups.**
- **Avoid products that claim to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.**  
These wedges, positioners, and other products have not been tested for safety or effectiveness.
- **Do not use home heart or breathing monitors to reduce the risk of SIDS.** If you have questions about using these monitors for other health conditions, talk with your baby's health care provider.
- **Give your baby plenty of Tummy Time when he or she is awake and when someone is watching.** Supervised Tummy Time helps your baby's neck, shoulder, and arm muscles get stronger. It also helps to prevent flat spots on the back of your baby's head. Holding baby upright and limiting time in carriers and bouncers can also help prevent flat spots on the back of baby's head.



***Place babies on their stomachs when they are awake and when someone is watching. Tummy Time helps your baby's head, neck, and shoulder muscles get stronger and helps to prevent flat spots on the head.***



## Answers to common questions about SIDS

**Q** What is the best way to reduce my baby's risk for SIDS?

**A** Placing your baby on his or her back to sleep for every sleep time is the best way to reduce the risk of SIDS.

**Q** Will my baby choke if placed on the back to sleep?

**A** No. Healthy babies naturally swallow or cough up fluids—it's a reflex all people have. Babies might actually clear such fluids better when on their backs.

**Q** What if my baby rolls onto the stomach on his or her own during sleep? Do I need to put my baby in the back sleep position again if this happens?

**A** No. Rolling over is an important and natural part of your baby's growth. Most babies start rolling over on their own around 4 to 6 months of age. If your baby rolls over on his or her own during sleep, you do not need to turn the baby over onto his or her back. The important thing is that the baby start off every sleep time on his or her back to reduce the risk of SIDS, and that there is no soft, loose bedding in the baby's sleep area.

# Spread the word!

Make sure *everyone* who cares for your baby knows the ways to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. Remember: Babies sleep safest on their backs, and every sleep time counts!

Help family members, babysitters, daycare workers—**EVERYONE**—reduce your baby's risk of SIDS and ensure a safe sleep area for your baby. Share these safe sleep messages with everyone who cares for your baby or for any baby younger than 1 year of age.

For more information, contact the Safe to Sleep campaign:

**Mail:** 31 Center Drive, 31/2A32, Bethesda, MD 20892-2425

**Phone:** 1-800-505-CRIB (2742)

**Fax:** 1-866-760-5947

**Website:** <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/SIDS>

Safe to Sleep campaign collaborators include:

*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health  
and Human Development

Health Resources and Services Administration/Maternal  
and Child Health Bureau

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of  
Reproductive Health

American Academy of Pediatrics

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

First Candle

Association of SIDS and Infant Mortality Programs



**SAFE TO SLEEP**



HEALTHY  
Native Babies

NIH Pub. No. 12-7462

September 2012

*Eunice Kennedy Shriver*  
**NICHHD**  
National Institute of Child Health  
& Human Development