



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

What Parents Can Do to Reduce the Risk of SIDS

SIDS or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is a term used to describe the sudden death of the infant which remains unexplained after a thorough investigation. SIDS is unexpected because it happens to seemingly healthy infants and is often associated with sleep. Although SIDS deaths in the U. S. have been decreasing, it is still the leading cause of death in infants between one month and one year of age. Most deaths occur before six months of age, with the highest number occurring between two and four months of age. SIDS is more likely to happen during the fall and winter months.

Even though we are still uncertain about the underlying cause for SIDS, it is clear that implementing risk-reduction measures have substantially lowered the rate of SIDS. The measures are promoted by the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the “Back to Sleep” campaign. The main message is that it is safest for healthy infants to sleep on their backs. In addition, there are other things parents can do to make their baby’s sleeping area safer.

Here are some scientifically-supported measures you can take to reduce your infant’s risk of SIDS:

1. **Lay your baby on his/her back for sleep.** This position carries the lowest risk of SIDS.
2. **Avoid smoking around your baby.** Research has shown that maternal smoking during pregnancy exposes the developing fetus to toxins and other harmful effects of cigarette smoke. There is mounting evidence that exposing a baby to cigarette smoke after birth also increases the risk of SIDS.
3. **Make the sleep environment safe.** Ensure that the crib mattress fits snugly and that the crib has no missing or broken parts. It is important to avoid soft bedding, thick blankets, and comforters. Remove pillows, bumpers, and soft crib toys such as stuffed animals. These items are associated with a higher risk for SIDS, possibly due to increasing the risk of carbon dioxide rebreathing.
4. **Avoid overheating, particularly when your baby is ill.** A baby should be lightly dressed and covered with a sheet or thin blanket. The room temperature should be warm enough for an adult to be comfortable in a short-sleeve shirt. Putting too much clothing on the baby, covering the baby with heavy bedding, or keeping a room too warm may increase the risk of SIDS.

5. **Breast feed your baby if possible.** Breast-fed babies are less likely to die of SIDS than bottle-fed babies.

Avoid having the baby sleep on an adult bed. The studies looking at the risk of co-sleeping have had mixed results. However, adult bedding materials like comforters and pillows can increase the risk of SIDS.

Here are two websites that have additional information about SIDS:

<http://sids-network.org/>

<http://www.sidscenter.org/>

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