Let's Talk About...

SIDS and Other Sleep-Related Infant Deaths

SIDS stands for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It is when a baby dies and they are less than one year old and the cause is not known. SIDS affects families of all races, religions, and income. The babies seem healthy before SIDS happens.

SIDS deaths have decreased a great deal since we have positioned babies on their backs when they sleep. These and other sleep accidents can be avoided by following these guidelines.

How can I prevent SIDS and other sleep-related death?

We do not know what causes SIDS, but some things may decrease SIDS. There is no product that prevents SIDS. However, there are things you can do to reduce the chance of your baby dying from SIDS:

- Place your baby completely on his back while he sleeps, even during naps. When babies are on their stomachs, they have a greater chance of breathing in carbon dioxide (air they have breathed out) and not breathe. Babies should not sleep on their sides or stomachs.

  Babies that sleep on their backs can develop flattening of the back of the head. Give your baby some "tummy time" (time on their tummy) while he is awake. This will help his head shape correctly. It is also good for his development.
- Use a safety-approved crib. The slats should be no more than 2 3/8 inches apart. You can check this by making sure you cannot fit a soda can between the bars. The crib should have no loose slats, rails, or loose hardware and the corner posts should not stick up. The headboard or footboard should not have cut-out designs.
- Use a firm mattress. The mattress should fit snugly. Make sure you can fit only two fingers between the mattress and the sides of the crib.
- Do not leave your child unattended on a waterbed, couch, sofa, pillow, cushion, or adult bed.
- Do not use sitting devices such as car seats, strollers, or swings for routine sleep for infants less than four months old. Infants can get into positions with these devices where they might suffocate.
- Do not use fluffy, loose bedding in your baby's crib. Do not use pillows, comforters, blankets, cushions, bumper pads, sheepskins, or stuffed animals.
- The safest covering for your baby during sleep is an infant pajama, such as a onesie® or sleep sack. If you use another covering arrange the crib so your baby's feet touch the end and tuck the blanket so it only comes to his chest. It will be harder for him to slide under the blanket or pull it over his face.
- Keep your baby's face free from coverings. Do not use coverings to block out sounds or light when your baby is sleeping.
- Do not let your baby get too hot. Overheating may increase SIDS. Your baby is comfortable in the same temperature that you are. The room where he sleeps should be comfortable for an adult sleeping in light clothing.
- Do not let anyone smoke around your baby. This increases the risk of SIDS and it may cause respiratory problems, such as asthma or emphysema.
- Try not to use medicine, alcohol, or drugs that may make it hard for you to wake up.

- Your baby should not sleep in bed with you even if using a “co-sleeping” bed. Keep your baby’s crib in the room where you sleep until he is at least six months old. Room sharing without bed sharing decreases the risk of SIDS by as much as 50%.
- Consider giving your baby a pacifier at bedtime or during naps. Pacifiers may decrease the risk of SIDS. Pacifiers do not cause problems with breastfeeding if given after your baby is one month old. Pacifiers do not cause dental problems later.
- Before you leave your baby with a babysitters or daycare workers, tell them the safety points listed above.
- Routine prenatal care, breastfeeding, and childhood immunizations protect against SIDS.
- Avoid commercial devices marketed to reduce SIDS such as wedges and positioners. These do not work.
- Home and hospital heart and breathing monitors do not lessen the risk of SIDS and do not identify infants at risk for SIDS.

Following these guidelines can lower the chance that your baby will die of SIDS.

If you have any questions, please talk with your doctor.

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