

SIDS: Advice can help keep your baby safe

By Kim Krisberg

As a parent, you do all you can to keep your baby safe, from using a safety seat in your car to putting protective plugs in your electrical outlets. But there's another time you want to take special care to keep your baby out of harm's way: while putting her or him to sleep.

While sleep time is important and healthy for your baby, it can also come with risks for sudden infant death syndrome. SIDS can happen to babies who seem otherwise perfectly healthy, with no warnings or red flags.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, SIDS is the sudden, often-unexplainable death of a young infant. Fortunately, there are ways you can reduce your baby's risk.

While rates of SIDS have been declining over the past two decades, it still remains the leading cause of death among babies between the ages of 1 month and 1 year, with the great majority of SIDS cases occurring in the first six months of life. Thankfully, the risk of SIDS significantly drops after the first year of a baby's life.

Research is still emerging on the exact causes of SIDS. Some studies have pointed to abnormalities in the brain related to breathing, heart rate and body temperature.

To help keep babies safe, experts focus on reducing risks, says Marian Willinger, PhD, program scientist and special assistant for

SIDS at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

"There are some specific factors we can act on that reduce the risk, which implies that



>> For more information and tips on reducing the risk of SIDS, visit www.nichd.nih.gov/sts

SIDS is a biological entity of some type," Willinger says.

Among the top tips to reduce the risk of SIDS is to always put babies to sleep on their backs. It's important to put babies to bed on a firm mattress with a fitted sheet. Babies put to sleep on softer surfaces, such as couches or armchairs, face a higher risk of SIDS, as well as suffocation.

The location where a baby sleeps matters too. Keeping a baby's sleep area in the same room as her or his caregiver is a recommended way to reduce the risk of SIDS, Willinger says. However, babies should still have their own sleep area and not share a bed with an adult.

"Make the baby's sleep area close to the bed, but not in the same bed," Willinger says.

Research finds that babies who sleep in an adult bed with one or more adults face a higher risk of SIDS, especially if the baby is younger than 3 months old.

Loose and soft bedding in a baby's sleep area also increases SIDS risk, so it's best to simply stick with a firm mattress and a fitted bed sheet. Blankets, pillows, toys and bumpers should not be used inside cribs.

Overheating may also be a SIDS risk. Babies should wear no more than one additional layer of clothing than an adult would wear and still be comfortable.

Many of the steps parents and caregivers can take to reduce the risk of SIDS have the added benefit of improving overall health as

well. Tobacco smoke exposure, for example, is another risk factor for SIDS. So keeping your home smoke-free is especially important.

Breastfeeding can have a positive preventive effect on SIDS as well.

Babies who are given breast milk during the first six months of life experience a lower risk of SIDS.

Women can also begin taking steps to reduce the risk of SIDS while they're pregnant. According to the institute, babies of mothers who receive regular health care during pregnancy face a lower risk of SIDS.

Women can also reduce SIDS risk by refraining from drinking, smoking and using illegal drugs during pregnancy and after their babies are born.



Quick tips for protecting your baby

- ◆ Always put babies to sleep on their backs.
- ◆ Put your baby to sleep on a firm mattress with a fitted sheet, not on a couch or chair.
- ◆ Keep your baby's crib in the same room where you sleep.
- ◆ Never sleep with your baby in your bed.
- ◆ Don't use blankets, pillows, toys and bumpers inside cribs.
- ◆ Limit how much clothing your baby wears while sleeping.
- ◆ Breastfeed your baby and keep your home smoke-free. Don't ever allow smoking around your baby.



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