

Reducing the risks of SIDS: what every parent should know



Highlights

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) can be reduced by practicing safe sleep for your baby.

Always place your baby on their back to sleep.

Keep your baby's head and face uncovered during sleep.

Provide a safe sleeping environment by using a firm, clean mattress and avoiding loose bedding.

Co-sleeping can increase the risk of SUDI, especially under certain conditions.

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Understanding unexpected infant deaths

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) refers to the sudden and unexpected death of a baby under 12 months old, with no immediate cause apparent. After investigations, possible causes could include accidental death, suffocation by bedclothes, infections, metabolic or genetic disorders, or non-accidental injuries. If the cause remains undetermined, it is referred to as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Simple ways to reduce your baby's risk

Although the causes of SUDI are not fully understood, research has shown that you can lower your baby's risk by following six key safety steps:

- Put your baby to sleep on their back.
- Keep their head and face uncovered.
- Keep them away from smoke exposure.
- Make their sleep environment safe.
- Have them sleep in a cot in your room.
- Breastfeed your baby, if possible.

Everyday habits for safer sleep

Sleep your baby on their back

This position reduces the risk of SUDI and should be used from birth for all sleep periods. Babies placed on their backs are less likely to choke on vomit. Only use side-sleeping if directed by a healthcare provider.

If you're worried about a flat head, rotate your baby's head position in the cot, reduce time in seats, and increase tummy time during awake periods.

Keep their head and face uncovered

Avoid any coverings on your baby's face while they sleep. Use a sleeping bag with fitted openings instead of loose blankets. If you use a blanket, tuck it tightly and place your baby with their feet at the cot's end to prevent sliding under it.

Even indoors or in a car, avoid head coverings like hats or hoods.

Keep your baby smoke-free

Cigarette smoke exposure before and after birth increases SUDI risk. If you or others smoke, always do so away from your baby and change clothes before holding them. Ask your doctor for help quitting smoking if needed.

Why sharing sleep space matters

Sleeping your baby in your room, but in their own cot, is the safest setup for the first 6 to 12 months. It allows for easier observation and quicker response. Use a bassinet or portable cot for daytime naps in the same room.

Co-sleeping: what to consider

Sharing a bed may feel natural, but it increases risk in some situations, such as:

If the adult has consumed alcohol or drugs

If the adult is very tired

If sleeping takes place on a sofa, bean bag, waterbed, or pillow

If your baby falls asleep in your bed after feeding or cuddling, always return them to their cot before you sleep.

Breastfeeding as added protection

Breastfeeding provides protection against SUDI. The benefits increase the longer you exclusively breastfeed. But even if you can't breastfeed, using the other safety steps will still greatly reduce risk.

Making your baby's sleep area safe

The sleep environment plays a key role in safety. Ensure the mattress is firm, flat, and clean. There should be no gaps between the mattress and the cot.

Remove all the following from the sleep area:

Cot bumpers
Pillows
Soft toys
Quilts or doonas

Tools and Assistance

Child health nurse or pediatrician: Seek advice on safe sleep practices, breastfeeding, and how to set up your baby's sleep space properly.

Support for quitting smoking: Health professionals can provide guidance and resources to help parents or caregivers stop smoking.

Safe sleep checklists: Print a simple checklist with key safe sleep guidelines and keep it near your baby's cot.

Breastfeeding support: If you face challenges with breastfeeding, consult a lactation expert for personalized help.

Parent support services: Look for local support services if you're feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or just need someone to talk to.

Educational resources: Health clinics and parenting centers often offer brochures, videos, and workshops about infant sleep safety.

Parenting groups: Connect with other parents to share experiences, ask questions, and support each other during the first year.