

## Safe sleep for babies

Good sleep habits are important for your baby's physical health and emotional well-being. Safe sleep includes things such as where your baby sleeps, their sleeping position, the type of crib or bed, the type of mattress, and the home environment.

Creating a safe sleep environment for your baby will lower the risk of injury and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). SIDS is when a baby (less than 1 year old), that seems healthy dies suddenly in their sleep, and the cause of death cannot be explained. We don't know what causes SIDS, so it cannot be prevented, but there are things you can do to help lower the risk.

### Where should my baby sleep?

**For the first 6 months**, the safest place for your baby to sleep is on their back, in a crib, cradle or bassinet that is in your room (room sharing). Having your baby close may help protect against SIDS, and will make nighttime feedings easier.

### How can I create a safe sleep environment for my baby?

- Parents and all caregivers, including grandparents and childcare providers, can help keep babies safe by following these steps:
- Always place your baby on their back to sleep, for *every* sleep.
- Create a safe sleep space that includes:
  - a firm, flat mattress with a tightly fitted bed sheet,
  - no gaps between the mattress and sides,
  - no loose, soft items, including blankets, pillows, bumper pads, mattress toppers, sleep positioners, or toys.

- Avoid waterbeds, air mattresses, or couches/sofas. Babies can turn onto their side or stomach and bury their face in these soft materials, not getting enough air to breathe.
- If possible, breastfeed your baby (see *Breastfeeding and safe sleep* below).
- Ensure your home is smoke free, before and after your baby is born (see *Smoke and safe sleep* below)
- Make sure your baby is not too warm (see *Overheating* below).
- Make sure that your baby's crib, cradle or bassinet meets Health Canada's most current safety standards.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when putting together and using the crib, cradle or bassinet.
- If you choose to swaddle your baby, follow a safe swaddling technique. Stop swaddling when your baby shows signs of rolling over.
- Take off bibs, necklaces, items with ties or hoods, and hats before putting your baby to sleep to prevent strangulation.

## In what position should my baby sleep?

Placing your baby **on their back for every sleep** is one of the most important things you can do to reduce the risk of SIDS. Let everyone that helps take care of your baby know to always put them on their back for naptime, nighttime, at home, in childcare settings and when travelling. Even babies who spit up a lot are safer sleeping on their backs. Healthy babies will naturally swallow or cough up fluids.

Once your baby can roll over on their own, there is no need to put them back on their back if they roll onto their side or tummy while sleeping.

If you use a baby sling or carrier, use it safely.

- Young or premature babies have poor neck control and are at higher risk of suffocating.
- Always keep your baby's face visible. Make sure it isn't pressed into your body, clothes or the carrier.
- Watch for overheating.

# What is room sharing?

Room sharing means placing your baby to sleep in their own safe sleep space (a crib, cradle or bassinet), which is placed in your room next to your bed. Room sharing is recommended for your baby's first 6 months—the time when the risk of SIDS is the highest.

# What about bed sharing?

While *room sharing* is encouraged, bed sharing increases a baby's risk of SIDS and suffocation. Bed sharing is when a baby sleeps on the same sleep surface as an adult or another child.

## Understand the risks of bed sharing:

- A baby can get trapped between the sleep surface and the wall, bedframe, or the body of an adult or other child.
- An adult or an older child can roll over and suffocate a baby.
- Soft bedding can cover a baby's head and cause them to overheat or suffocate.
- In-bed sleeping products such as baby nests or pods don't keep your baby safe when bed sharing. The padded sides increase the risk of suffocation.

## ***If you bed share (even if you did not plan to) be sure to:***

- always put your baby on their back,
- have a firm and flat sleep surface, with no gaps where your baby can get trapped,
- keep soft loose bedding or other objects well away from your baby,
- dress your baby so they do not overheat.

# Overheating

Overheating increases your baby's risk of SIDS. Here are some things to consider:

- Your baby is safest when they sleep in a properly fitted sleepwear—like a one-piece sleeper. It should keep your baby comfortable at room temperature, so they do not get too hot.

- Keep the room at a comfortable temperature. If it is comfortable for you, it will be comfortable for your baby too.
- Babies do not need blankets when they sleep. Blankets can cause them to overheat or suffocate.
- If you use a sleep sack, make sure it is the right size for your baby. If it's too big, your baby's head can slip down inside the sack, which can cause your baby to overheat or suffocate. If it's too tight, your baby may not be able to move their hips and legs freely, which can be dangerous, especially if they roll onto their tummy.

## Breastfeeding and safe sleep

Breast milk is the best food you can offer your baby. The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life.

Breastfeeding can help protect your baby from SIDS. Breastfeeding for at least 2 months will lower the risk of SIDS by about half. The longer you can breastfeed, the more protection your baby will have.

Young babies feed often—including during the night. If you bring your baby into your bed to breastfeed, know which situations put babies at greatest risk when bed sharing so that you can avoid them (see section on *Bed sharing* above). Put your baby back in their crib, cradle or bassinet after each feeding.

## Smoking and safe sleep

Being smoke-free, before and after birth, decreases your baby's risk of SIDS. In fact, 1 out of 3 SIDS deaths could be prevented if pregnant women did not smoke. Even reducing the amount you smoke can lower the risk of SIDS. Other things to keep in mind:

- Second-hand smoke (cigarette or cannabis) increases the risk of SIDS after your baby is born. Do not let anyone smoke around your baby.
- Vaping products can expose your baby to nicotine and other harmful chemicals. Don't vape while pregnant. After birth, make sure that no one vapes around your baby.

# Products not recommended for safe sleep

- Bed-side sleepers (that attach to an adult bed)
- Baby nests or pods
- Inclined sleepers, baby hammocks, crib wedges/positioners
- Playpens
  - If you use a playpen for your baby to sleep in while travelling, be sure to position it away from blind/curtain cords and electrical cords, which babies can strangle on.
  - Never add an extra mattress or padding.
  - Keep it free of soft items, bedding and toys when your baby sleeps.
- High chairs, baby swings, bouncers, strollers, and car seats
  - Sleeping in a sitting position can cause your baby's head to fall forward, which can make it hard to breathe.
  - If your baby falls asleep in a car seat or stroller, move them to a crib, cradle or bassinet when you arrive at your destination.

## Additional resources

- Safe sleep for your baby (Public Health Agency of Canada)  
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/childhood-adolescence/stages-childhood/infancy-birth-two-years/safe-sleep/safe-sleep-your-baby-brochure.html>)
- Safe sleep (Public Health Agency of Canada)  
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/safe-sleep.html>)
- SIDS and Reducing the Risks (Baby's Breath)  
(<https://www.babysbreathcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SIDS-and-Reducing-the-risks-3.pdf>)
- Safe sleeping for your baby (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority)  
(<https://healthyparentingwinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Sleep-Handout-V2->

## Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Community Paediatrics Committee

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