



# SAFE SLEEPING FOR BABIES

- **Sleep baby on the back from birth, not on the tummy or side**
- **Sleep baby with head and face uncovered**
- **Keep baby smoke free before birth and after birth**
- **Provide a safe sleeping environment night and day**
- **Sleep baby in their own safe sleeping place in the same room as an adult care-giver for the first six to twelve months**
- **Breastfeed baby**

## Why safe sleeping is important.

- All parents want the best for their baby and most are anxious about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS. SIDS occurs during sleep and is a diagnosis of exclusion – where no clear cause of death can be identified.
- Recently, the term Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy or SUDI has replaced SIDS. SUDI is unexpected death of an infant, usually occurring during sleep, in which a cause of death is not immediately obvious.
- SUDI refers to a broad category of sudden and unexpected deaths, which includes SIDS, infections or anatomical or developmental abnormalities not recognised before death, sleep accidents due to unsafe sleep environments, and sudden unexpected deaths revealed to have been the result of non-accidental injuries.
- Since safe sleeping recommendations were introduced in the early 1990's the incidence of SUDI has decreased by over 85% with an estimated 10,000 babies lives being saved.

## 1. Sleep baby on the back from birth, not on the tummy or side

There is now conclusive evidence that sleeping infants on their tummy significantly increases the risk of SUDI.

- Some parents are concerned about sleeping babies on their backs because they believe there is an increased risk of their baby choking. However, careful research has shown that healthy babies placed to sleep on the back are less likely to choke or vomit than when sleeping on their tummy. This is because when babies sleep on their backs the airway is above the oesophagus (digestive tract) therefore, regurgitated milk is readily swallowed again so choking is avoided. When the baby is placed on their tummy the oesophagus sits above the airway so if the baby regurgitates or vomits milk, it is easier for the milk or fluid to be inhaled into the airway and lungs, leading to choking or reduced breathing.
- Parents often say their baby "sleeps better" on their tummy. This is because babies have more deep sleep in this position so they awaken from sleep less often. A failure to awaken from sleep is widely believed to be the reason why babies die from SIDS. When babies sleep on their tummies, they have lower blood pressure and reduced oxygen in their brain and this will contribute to their reduced ability to awaken from sleep.
- Babies born prematurely are often slept on their tummies while being monitored in hospital and this is to improve their breathing. However, it is important babies who have been born prematurely are slept *on their backs at home*, as they are at increased risk for SIDS.



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## 2. Sleep baby with head and face uncovered

There is conclusive evidence that covering a baby's head or face significantly increases the risk of SUDI.

- Parents are currently advised to place the infant at the foot of the cot in the "feet to foot" position and to make bedding up with a sheet and blanket so there is a reduced risk of the infant slipping under the bedding.
- Heavy bedding, such as doonas/duvets and quilts should never be used. Anything that could cover a baby's face should not be in the cot (e.g., pillows, security blankets, toys).
- Cot bumper pads and similar products that attach to the sides of the cot are not recommended because there is a risk the baby can become trapped between the mattress and bumper pad or choke on the bumper pad ties.
- A safe infant sleeping bag provides a good alternative to traditional bedding. A safe infant sleeping bag is one that prevents the infant slipping inside the bag and the head becoming covered. The infant sleeping bag should be the correct size for the infant, with a fitted neck and armholes or sleeves to keep the baby warm and no hood to avoid head covering.

## 3. Keep baby smoke free before birth and after birth

There is now conclusive evidence that exposure to cigarette smoke during pregnancy and after birth significantly increases the risk of SUDI. Maternal smoking is now the most important modifiable risk factor for SUDI.

- Any reduction in maternal smoking during pregnancy decreases the risk of SUDI. Mothers are encouraged to try and reduce the number of cigarettes smoked as much as possible.
- As breast feeding is protective for SUDI, mothers who smoke are encouraged to breastfeed to reduce the risk of SUDI.
- The safest place for a baby to sleep is in a cot in the parents' bedroom (room-sharing) for the first six to twelve months. This has been shown to lower the risk of SUDI, including in families where one or both parents smoke.
- Sharing a sleep surface with a baby (co-sleeping or bed-sharing) increases the risk of SUDI. There is a much greater risk of SUDI if either the mother or both parents smoke and share a sleep surface with their baby. This is particularly important for babies under 3 months of age.
- If fathers smoke, there is an even greater risk of SUDI. Smoke exposure should be minimised by smoking outside and never smoking around the baby in confined spaces such as the car.

## 4. Provide a safe sleeping environment night and day

The safest place for a baby to sleep is in a cot in the same room as parents/caregivers. The sleeping surface should be clean, flat and firm. It is important the mattress fits snugly in the cot so the baby cannot become wedged between the mattress and the cot frame. There should be no soft or loose bedding, pillows, cot bumpers, lambs wools or soft toys in the cot which could cover the baby's face.

- All cots, new and second hand, sold in Australia must meet the Australian Standard Safety Requirements for cots (AS/NZS 2172-2003). The test method set out in the Australian Standard for 'sleep surfaces – test for firmness' is a voluntary standard (AS/NZS 8811.1:2013).
- The voluntary mattress firmness test is only in place for mattresses supplied with the cot, not mattresses sold separately. *There is no mandatory Australian standard to check for when buying many other nursery products.*
- There is no Australian Standard for bassinets. Babies grow quickly and may grow out of a bassinet as early as 2 months of age. Each bassinet comes with different recommendations as to when to move to a cot. This can also depend on how big and how quickly your baby grows. Bassinets should not be used once a baby can roll over or pull themselves up the side of the bassinet, which is usually 4-6 months of age.
- It is important for parents buying a product for their baby to be able to make the best-informed decision based on evidence of product safety. This is crucial for preventing SUDI or other fatal sleeping accidents. It is often assumed all nursery products sold in retail stores are safe, however many products have never been formally tested so it can be difficult to tell what is safe for your baby.

## 5. Sleep baby in their own safe sleeping place in the same room as an adult care-giver for the first six to twelve months

Room-sharing, but not bed-sharing, with your baby reduces the risk of SUDI by up to 50%.

- Room-sharing facilitates a rapid response to your baby's needs, supports breastfeeding, is more convenient for settling and comforting babies, and provides closer parent-baby contact and communication. Sensory stimulation (e.g. sounds and smells) of the baby through sharing the same room as a parent is thought to reduce risk of SUDI.



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## 6. Breastfeed baby

Breastfeeding is the optimal source of nutrition for your baby, with many benefits for both mother and baby. Breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the risk of SUDI by up to 50%.

- All mothers, including those who smoke, are encouraged to breastfeed their babies.
- The mechanisms by which breastfeeding is protective is not fully understood, but are believed to be related to breastmilk components, maternal behaviour and the mechanism of breastfeeding.
- Physiological studies have demonstrated that breast fed infants are more easily woken up from sleep compared to formula fed infants. In addition, breast feeding is associated with a decreased incidence of diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections and other infectious diseases.

## Other recommendations for safe sleep

### ● Bed sharing or sharing a sleep surface with your baby

Sharing a sleep surface with your baby can increase the risk of SUDI even if the baby is breastfed and the parents do not smoke.

- More than half of all SUDI cases occur whilst the baby is bed sharing.
- Bed sharing increases the risk of SUDI particularly if the baby is under 3 months of age or has been born prematurely or small for their age.
- Bed sharing presents an even greater risk of SUDI if either parent smokes, drinks alcohol or takes illicit drugs.
- There is no increased risk of SUDI whilst sharing a sleep surface with a baby during feeding, cuddling and playing providing the baby is returned to a cot or their own safe sleeping surface before the parent goes back to sleep.
- Falling asleep on a sofa or couch is a particular risk. Often parents/carers will fall asleep unintentionally on a sofa or couch and there is a very high risk of a sleeping accident in this situation as the baby may become wedged into cushions or the back of the sofa, or even fall onto the floor injuring themselves.
- Sleeping your baby on their tummy on your chest, is an excellent strategy for settling, and helping them to self-regulate, as long as the baby and their airway are being observed. A parent falling asleep with a baby on the tummy on the parent's chest and unobserved can be a risk, as sleeping on the tummy reduces the mechanisms that protect baby's airway. In addition, the baby's nose may become blocked by clothing, or the parent's body or breast, or the baby may become positioned with his/her chin to chest, which will also block the baby's airway.

### ● Infant swaddling or wrapping

Swaddling or wrapping your baby is a useful strategy to calm them and promote back sleeping. There is no evidence to recommend swaddling or wrapping as a strategy to reduce the risk of SUDI.

- Use only lightweight wraps such as cotton or muslin (bunny rugs and blankets are not safe as they may cause overheating). The wrap should be firm, to prevent loose wrapping becoming loose bedding, which could cover your baby's face. However, the wrap should not be too tight and must allow for hip and chest wall movement.
- If babies are swaddled or wrapped, they *must* always be placed on their back. There is a greatly increased risk of SUDI if a swaddled baby is placed, or rolls onto their tummy.
- As soon as baby shows signs of beginning to roll, wrapping should be stopped for sleep periods.
- An alternative to wrapping is to use a safe infant sleeping bag; one with a fitted neck and armholes that is the right size for the baby's weight. However, there is no current evidence that sleeping bags are protective against SUDI.
- There are a wide range of products designed as infant swaddles, wraps and wearable blankets on the market. It is important to be aware that there is very limited evidence to support the use of these products as devices to promote infant settling, back sleeping and no evidence to support these products as a strategy to reduce the risk of SUDI.
- Devices which use Velcro to securely wrap the baby are not recommended as there is a risk that if the infant turns onto their tummy or their face becomes covered in bedding, they will not be able to move to escape potentially suffocating positions.

### ● Dummy (pacifier) use is protective

Studies have reported a reduced risk of SUDI associated with dummy use.

- A dummy can be offered after breast feeding is established and should be used consistently for every sleep.
- Dummies can be offered to bottle-fed infants from birth.
- The mechanism by which dummies might reduce the risk of SUDI is not fully understood. Several mechanisms have been suggested including avoidance of sleeping on the tummy, protection of the airway and keeping the nose clear of bedding.

### ● Immunisation is protective

No study has demonstrated an increased risk of SUDI with immunisation. Studies have confirmed that SUDI rate is nearly halved in immunised babies compared with those not immunised. Similarly, no study has shown an increase in autism with immunisation. Immunisation is a simple, safe and effective way of protecting against a number of infective diseases.



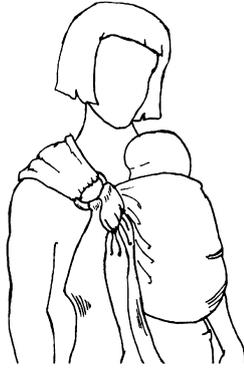
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# The **T.I.C.K.S.** Rule for Safe Babywearing

Keep your baby close and keep your baby safe.

When you're wearing a sling or carrier, don't forget the **T.I.C.K.S.**



- ✓ **TIGHT**
- ✓ **IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES**
- ✓ **CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS**
- ✓ **KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST**
- ✓ **SUPPORTED BACK**

## ● Home monitoring does not prevent SUDI

Baby breathing monitors are not necessary for healthy babies and toddlers. There is no scientific evidence that using any type of monitor will prevent SUDI, despite claims from some manufacturers.

- Monitor use is disruptive for most families and unnecessary for most babies.
- In a small number of cases, health professionals may recommend the use of home monitors, where their use can be helpful for babies and families.

## ● Safe use of baby carriers and slings

Baby carriers and slings can be a risk for SUDI if not used appropriately.

- Adult worn slings and baby carriers are usually made of soft fabric and allow an adult to carry an infant hands-free. The sling straps around the adult's neck, allowing the infant to lie in front of the adult, curved in a C-shape position.
- Strap on carriers allow the infant to be in an upright position with the infant's head facing that of the carrier.
- Slings and strap on carriers are becoming increasingly popular.
- Babies can suffocate lying with a curved back with the chin resting on the chest or the face pressed against the fabric of the sling or wearer's body.
- Parents should follow the T.I.C.K.S. guide to safe carrying of their infant in a sling (<http://babyslingsafety.co.uk/ticks.pdf>).

## Further information

<https://rednose.com.au/resources/education>

For information on over 70 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au). The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



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