Safe Sleep for Infants

A reference for medical students
What is “safe sleep”?

- Established, evidence-based guidelines for keeping infants safe while asleep, at naptime and at night.
- Focus on ensuring that infant’s face is not obstructed and that they are able to breathe.
- Some special guidelines exist for preemies or infants with other health concerns, but otherwise these guidelines are applicable to most babies.
- Safe sleep is something medical students can (and should!) discuss at hospital discharge and during well-infant check-ups!
Why should I care about safe sleep? Why should parents care?

- Safe sleep saves lives!
  - The “Back to Sleep” campaign, an early element of safe sleep, decreased infant deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS.
  - SIDS has many causes, most unknown. Safe sleep, however, is thought to have eliminated many cases of asphyxiation that occurred when infants were put to sleep on their bellies.
- Other protective factors against SIDS include: breastfeeding, not smoking, and routine immunizations.
Basic Rules of Safe Sleep - the ABCs!

- **Alone**
  - Babies should sleep alone, never in bed with parents or others.
  - There is a risk of smothering an infant unintentionally if someone were to roll over on top of the infant.

- **Back**
  - Babies should sleep on their backs.
  - If they sleep face down, there is a risk of their mouth and nose being obstructed by the bedding/mattress causing them to suffocate.

- **Crib**
  - Babies should sleep in a crib (or similar device) with a firm mattress and only a thin, fitted sheet over top.
  - No heavy blankets, crib bumpers, or toys because of the suffocation risk.
  - Can swaddle babies <4 months if concerned about baby being cold.
FAQs from Parents
Can I co-sleep with my baby?

- Clarify - what do they mean by co-sleeping?
  - Room-sharing - baby’s crib in parents’ room
  - Bed-sharing - baby sleeps in parents’ bed

- Room-sharing - AAP recommends room sharing until one year, or until at least 6 months
  - Decreases SIDS risk, especially in first 6 months

- Bed-sharing - No!
  - Risk of rolling over baby or infant being smothered by soft mattress/bedding
  - Some families may purchase “co-sleeping devices”, but none have statistically been shown to mitigate risk of co-sleeping
Won’t my baby be cold? They need more blankets!

- Thick blankets and other warm linens can increase the risk of an infant being smothered.
  - Overheating is a risk factor for SIDS.
  - Sleep sacks, swaddle blankets, or double layers of pajamas are great options to keep the baby appropriately warm.
- Swaddling should be stopped when babies can roll over.
What do I do when my baby starts to roll over? Do I need to stay up all night rolling them to their back?

- No!
- Parents should still put the baby to bed on their back.
  - When the baby is able to roll over, they can roll themselves back.
- Once babies can roll over, they should no longer be put to bed swaddled. Swaddling can decrease their ability to roll back.
  - Babies tend to roll over starting around 4-6 months, so consider stopping swaddling at night around 3-4 months.
Will a high-tech crib and other gadgets keep my baby safe?

- No! Less is more.
  - Alone, back to sleep, in a regular crib is the safest place for babies.
- Fancy high-tech cribs do not have evidence to show any reduction in SIDS risk.
- The AAP recommends against home apnea monitors except when medically indicated.

$1200 “Smart Sleeper”

$80 very safe, regular crib
There are other safe surfaces for sleep. Remind parents that positioning should ensure that the infant’s face is free from obstruction and that their head does not fall forward.

**YES!**
- “Pack and Play” with firm mattress
- Bassinette
- “Baby Box”
- Firm, flat surface

**NO!**
- Car seats, outside of the car.
- Baby seats, bouncy seats, swings
- “Rock and Play”
- Sofas, couches, loveseats, etc.
- Pillows
- With sleeping parents
Take Home Points

- Talk about safe sleep at each and every well-infant visit!
- A good safe sleep motto is “less is more”
- ABCs of safe sleep
  - Alone
  - (on their) Back
  - (in a) Crib (with a firm mattress)
- Encourage parents to utilize resources from the AAP, CDC, and other reputable organizations
References for Parents

AAP Safe Sleep Guidelines + Evidence:
https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162938

Safe Sleep NIH Infographics:

Safe Sleep CDC:
https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/safesleep/index.html

Safe Sleep March of Dimes:
https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/safe-sleep-for-your-baby.aspx
Project References and Further Reading

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SIDS and Safe Sleep:

AAP Safe Sleep Research:  https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162940

Safe Sleep FAQ:  https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162940

NIH Safe Sleep:  https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/research/science/backsleeping