

# Safe Sleep for Infants

**A reference for medical students**

# What is “safe sleep”?

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- 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?

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- 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!



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- **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?

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- **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!

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- 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?

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- 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

# I don't have a crib. Where else can my baby safely sleep?

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- 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

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- **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

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## AAP Safe Sleep Guidelines + Evidence:

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162938>

## Safe Sleep NIH Infographics:

[https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2019-02/Safe\\_Sleep\\_Environ\\_upd\\_ate.pdf](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2019-02/Safe_Sleep_Environ_upd_ate.pdf)

## 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:

[https://www.uptodate.com/contents/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-risk-factors-and-risk-reduction-strategies?search=safe%20sleep&source=search\\_result&selectedTitle=1~150&usage\\_type=default&display\\_rank=1](https://www.uptodate.com/contents/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-risk-factors-and-risk-reduction-strategies?search=safe%20sleep&source=search_result&selectedTitle=1~150&usage_type=default&display_rank=1)

**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>