Safer sleep for babies

A guide for parents and carers

the lullaby trust

THE BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

unicef UNITED KINGDOM

Basis
Baby sleep info source

Safer sleep for babies

The information in this booklet about safer sleep has saved many babies' lives and is backed by years of research. It is designed to empower you to make informed decisions about your baby's sleep, on how to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS, or cot death). To reduce the risk of SIDS, families and anyone involved in the care of a baby should follow this key advice for baby sleep.

Put your baby on their **back** for every sleep

In a **clear, flat, separate sleep space**

Keep them **smoke free** day and night

Babies need a sober carer to respond to their needs

Always place your baby on their back for sleep

- Put your baby down on their back for every sleep.
- No special equipment or products are needed to keep them on their back.
- Once they start to roll from back to front and front to back by themselves, you can leave them to find their own sleep position.
- Tummy time whilst awake can help strengthen their muscles for rolling.

Reason:

Many more babies have died suddenly when placed to sleep on their front or side, rather than their back. Since our Back to Sleep campaign in 1991, the rate of SIDS has dropped by 81%.

Give your baby a clear, flat, separate sleep space in the same room as you, such as a cot or Moses basket

Whatever space you choose, follow this guidance:

- A firm, flat mattress with no raised or cushioned areas.
- No pillows, quilts, duvets, bumpers or weighted bedding.
- No pods, nests or sleep positioners.
- Make sure your baby's head is kept uncovered so they don't get too hot.
- Try to keep the room temperature between 16–20°C, and use bedding that is appropriate for the room temperature.
- Place baby at the bottom of the cot so they can't wriggle under covers (this is called feet to foot).
- Ensure the sleep space is clear of all items and nothing is within reach of the space (e.g. blind cords, toys or nappy sacks).
- Babies should be in the same room as you for the first six months of sleep, day and night. You can leave the room to make a drink or go to the toilet. But most of the time, when they are sleeping, it is safest if you are close by.
- Babies should not sleep in bouncy chairs, beanbags or in a seated position. Babies should not be left sleeping in the car seat when not travelling in the car.

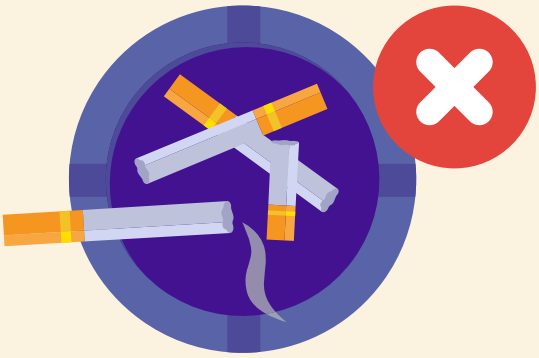
Reason:

Soft or raised surfaces, pillows or quilts can increase the risk of SIDS by making it difficult for babies to breathe or cool down. The risk of SIDS is lower when babies sleep in a room with an adult than when they sleep alone.

Remember:

If you're using a sleeping bag, no extra bedding is needed.

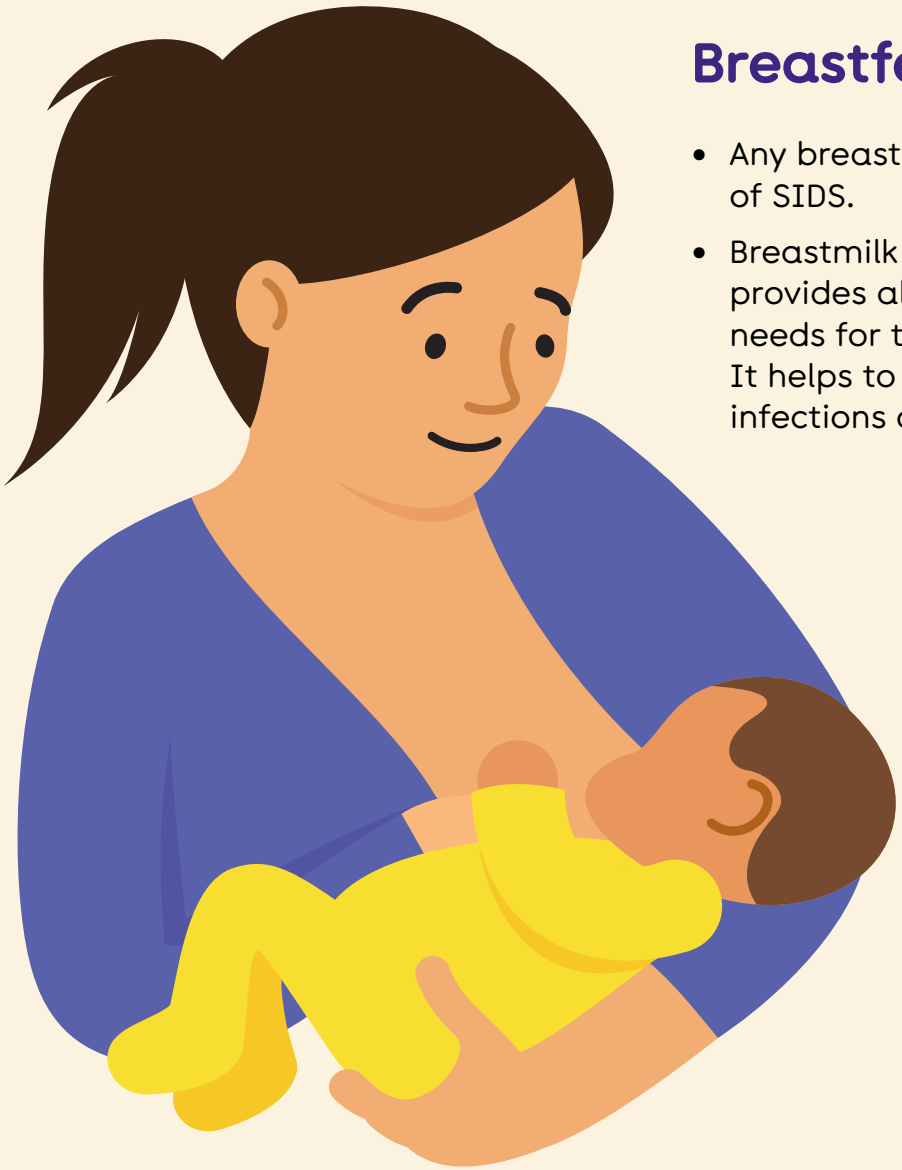
Keep your baby smoke free before and after birth



- Smoking in pregnancy greatly increases the risk of SIDS. Anyone pregnant should make every effort to take up the specialist help offered locally to stop smoking, as it is harder to do it alone.
- If you're pregnant, you should avoid being exposed to others' smoke. If your partner or someone you live with smokes, they can consider seeking help to quit too.
- Keep your baby away from smoke in your home, car or out and about.

Reason:

Babies exposed to tobacco smoke before or after birth have a much greater risk of SIDS than babies that are kept smoke-free.



Breastfeeding

- Any breastfeeding lowers the risk of SIDS.
- Breastmilk and breastfeeding provides all the nutrition your baby needs for the first six months. It helps to protect them against infections and diseases.

If you need more help with breastfeeding, talk to your midwife or health visitor. Or call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212.

Bedsharing more safely

Whether you choose to bedshare, or it is unplanned, there are some key risks you should avoid.

It is dangerous to share a bed with your baby if:

- You or anyone in the bed has recently drunk any alcohol.
- You or the baby was exposed to smoking during pregnancy.
- You or anyone in the bed has taken any drugs or medication that make you feel sleepy.
- Your baby was born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy), or weighed under 5 ½ pounds when they were born.

In these scenarios, it is always best to put baby in their own clear, flat, separate sleep space. Keeping your baby's cot or Moses basket next to the bed might make it easier to do this.

Reason:

Studies have found that bedsharing with your baby after drinking alcohol or using drugs has a very high risk of SIDS. Sleeping close to a smoker also greatly increases the risk of SIDS. Premature and very small babies have a greater risk of SIDS when they share the bed with an adult.

Things to remember if bedsharing

Pets or other children shouldn't also be in bed with you.

Remove slatted or decorated headboards. Keep pillows and adult bedding away from your baby.

Check your baby can't become trapped in the bedframe or headboard. Check they can't become wedged or fall out of bed. Check they can't get stuck between the mattress and wall.

Never leave your baby alone in an adult bed.

Never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair

Sofas and armchairs are dangerous places to fall asleep with your baby. Place your baby in their own sleep space, such as a cot or Moses basket if you might fall asleep.

Reason:

The risk of SIDS is significantly increased for babies when they sleep on a sofa or armchair with an adult. They are also at risk of accidental death as they can easily slip into a position where they are trapped and can't breathe.

Thinking ahead

As we mentioned earlier, alcohol, drugs and even some medication make it hard for parents to respond to their babies' needs. If you are consuming alcohol or drugs for example, plan ahead to have another sober adult around to take care of the baby.

Reason:

Every day can be different for families with unplanned changes to your baby's sleep environment. It's important to make sure your baby always has a safer sleep space to reduce their risk of SIDS.

Any time you feel you might fall asleep with your baby, make sure they are on their back in a clear, flat, separate sleep space. If you're breastfeeding whilst lying down, ensure your baby can't roll on their front. Keep your baby on their back, or move them onto their back once they've been fed.

Slings and baby carriers

Slings and baby carriers are useful for holding a baby; however, they are not always used safely.

It's important to ensure that your baby's airway (breathing tube) is always clear in a sling or baby carrier. You can do this by keeping their chin off their chest, and making sure their mouth and nose are not covered.

Visit our website for the most up to date guidance on using a sling or baby carrier.

More information

- **Premature babies**: lullabytrust.org.uk/premature
- **When babies start to roll**: lullabytrust.org.uk/sleeping-position
- **Swaddling and slings**: lullabytrust.org.uk/swaddling-slings
- For advice on **safer sleep for twins and multiples**: twinstrust.org

If you follow the advice in this leaflet for every sleep, the risk of SIDS is very low. But please don't worry alone – if you have a question, people are here to help. Ask your midwife, health visitor, or contact The Lullaby Trust or Basis.

Remember:

If you're worried your baby is showing signs of being unwell, The Lullaby Trust's Baby Check app can help you decide whether they need to see a healthcare professional or not. It can give you peace of mind, and is available for free from Google Play or the App Store.

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At The Lullaby Trust, we exist to keep babies safe and keep grieving families supported.

We hope you found this information helpful and empowering. If you did, please consider donating today. You can place this same information in the hands of another parent or carer who needs it. Help us empower the next family: lullabytrust.org.uk/donate

the lullaby trust

For every baby.
For every family.
Forever.

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