



Health Fact Sheet

Back to Sleep: Preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

The unexpected death of an infant is a parent's worst nightmare. Sudden infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS, is the leading cause of death among infants one month to one year of age. Most SIDS deaths occur by the age of six months with the greatest number taking place between two and four months of age. Researchers have found that placing an infant to sleep on his back can dramatically reduce the incidence of SIDS.

Most researchers now believe that babies who die of SIDS are born vulnerable to stresses that occur in the normal life of an infant. In many cases, their mothers received poor prenatal care, used drugs or alcohol, had poor nutrition or went into preterm labor. Since the early 1990s, SIDS death have dropped 40% following the Back to Sleep campaign, a program encouraging parents to put their babies to sleep on their backs. Infants who normally sleep on their backs at home must be placed on their backs in child care settings. While sleeping on her stomach, an infant may not be able to move her head and could suffocate researchers noted.

Reducing the Risks of SIDS

- Put your baby to sleep on her back. If you baby has problems with spitting up and vomiting, please consult your pediatrician on the best sleep position.
- Do not smoke around infants
- Don't let your infant get overheated. Dress your baby like you would dress yourself. Do not wrap your baby in lots of blankets. If your infant is sweating, he may be too hot.
- Put your infant to sleep on a hard, firm mattress. Do not let babies sleep on soft comforters or blankets. Babies can easily suffocate from these soft materials.
- Encourage parents to seek medical care early in pregnancy. Make every effort to get good nutrition. These measures can all reduce the risks of premature birth, a major risk factor for SIDS.
- Wash your hand to reduce the spread of infection. SIDS often occurs in association with relatively minor respiratory infections.

- Remember that while infants are awake, they need "tummy time." Lie the baby on his stomach during waking hours to develop back, neck and stomach muscles.

Additional Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.aap.org/>