



English
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Sudden Infant Death Syndrome – How to Lower The Risk

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The biggest killer of babies aged from one month to one year is SIDS - short for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or "cot death". Each week in Australia, an average of five babies dies as a result of this problem.

Most of these babies are under the age of six months and most deaths happen in winter rather than summer. Babies have died from SIDS at all times of the day and night, in cots, prams, car seats, bassinets and even in their parent's arms. SIDS isn't a disease, but a term used for the sudden, unexplained death of a baby who seems well, or almost well, and whose death can't even be explained by a post-mortem examination.

But there's some good news. Thanks to better education about the risks of SIDS, the number of deaths has been reduced by more than 50 per cent over the last six years. Although the cause of SIDS is still a mystery, research in Australia and other parts of the world suggests it's possible for parents, grandparents and other carers to lower the risk in these simple ways:

- ***Make sure the baby sleeps on its back.*** The risk of SIDS is increased if babies sleep on their tummies. Until recently parents were advised to sleep babies on their backs or their sides - however a baby sleeping on its side may roll on to its tummy. Although some parents may worry that babies sleeping on their backs may choke, research shows that healthy babies placed on their backs are no more likely to regurgitate their food and choke. But if your baby has certain medical conditions, a doctor or nurse may recommend sleeping on the side or tummy.
- ***Make sure the baby's head is uncovered during sleep.*** If a baby's head becomes covered by bedclothes the risk of

SIDS is increased. Loose bedclothes can easily cover a baby's head, so it's important to tuck the baby in securely so he or she can't slip under the them. During a baby's first year don't use bedclothes such as quilts or doonas which can't be tucked in securely, and don't leave soft toys, pillows and cot bumpers in the place where your baby sleeps. There's no need for a baby to have a pillow. Use a firm, clean well fitting mattress (but never put babies down to sleep on a water bed or a bean bag). When you put a baby down to sleep, always position the baby's feet at the bottom of the cot.

- ***Keep the baby smoke-free before birth and after.*** The risk of SIDS is increased if the mother smokes during pregnancy and may also be increased if the father smokes as well. If both parents are non-smokers, there is a lower risk of SIDS. Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke also have a higher risk of SIDS, so make sure no one smokes near your baby - not in the house, the car, or anywhere else. (If you're a smoker who finds it hard to quit, ask your doctor for advice).

If you have any other questions about reducing the risk of SIDS, the best people to ask are your doctor, midwife or the sister at the Early Childhood Centre.

August 29 is Red Nose Day, a special day to raise awareness of SIDS and the need for more research into the causes. You can help raise money for this research by buying a red nose. You'll find these on sale next week at some supermarkets and service stations.