A PARENT’S GUIDE TO A SAFE SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

Congratulations on the birth of your baby. Following safe sleep guidelines will help to ensure the safety of your baby in the hospital and at home.

Tragically, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the most common cause of death in infants between 1 month and 1 year of age. Around 4500 babies die in the United States each year because of sudden unexpected infant deaths. Not all sudden unexpected infant deaths are SIDS; some of these deaths are accidental suffocation. There are many things that can be done by yourself and by others caring for your baby to reduce the risk of these things happening to your baby.

Top-10 things to promote a safe sleep environment are as follows (Figure 1):

1. Always place your baby on the back at bedtime and at nap time.
   - Using the back position, the number of babies dying of SIDS has been cut in half, from more than 4000 to 2220 each year.
   - Do not use the side position for sleeping babies. You should not be afraid of your baby aspirating (getting milk in the lungs) because when a baby spits up while sleeping on its back, most of the milk will roll out of the mouth. The windpipe (or trachea) is on top of the esophagus (or feeding tube) and gravity will keep the milk away from the airway.

   - Position your baby in the “Feet to Foot” position. Have your baby’s feet touch the bottom of the bed.
   - Tuck your baby’s blankets in around the crib mattress and away from your baby’s face.

3. Never use soft bedding, comforters, pillows, loose sheets, blankets, sheepskins, toys, or bumpers in the crib or sleep area.
   - These things may put your baby at risk for suffocation.
   - Keep your baby’s sleep environment empty of everything but your baby.
   - Decorate your baby’s room for yourself and others, not the baby’s crib.

4. Always put your baby to sleep in a separate but close sleep environment.
   - Bed sharing with your baby increases the chance of dying of SIDS by 40 times.
   - Adult beds and bedding are soft and pose a suffocation risk.
   - Breastfeeding provides many benefits for your baby. You may breastfeed your baby in bed with you, but always return your baby to their own separate safe sleep environment when the feeding finished.

5. Never allow anyone to smoke around your baby.
   - Passive smoke near your baby doubles the risk of dying of SIDS.

6. Think about offering a clean, dry pacifier to your baby at sleep times.
   - Research has shown that pacifier use is protective against SIDS.
   - If you are breastfeeding, delay using a pacifier until 1 month of age, so breastfeeding can be well established.
A PARENT’S GUIDE TO A SAFE SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

- If using a pacifier, there is no need to reinsert the pacifier once your baby has fallen asleep.
- Do not force your baby to use a pacifier or coat a pacifier with sweet solutions.

7. Do not overheat your baby.
- If you are comfortable in the room, then your baby will be as well.
- Researchers believe that overheating affects the baby’s brain control over breathing and waking up if there is a breathing problem.
- Keep your baby’s room temperature at a level comfortable for a lightly clothed adult (around 68ºF-70ºF).
- Use a thin blanket or an “Infant Sleep Sack” if an extra layer is needed for your baby.

8. Avoid using products on your baby that claim to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- These products have not been tested for effectiveness or safety to be used with your baby.

9. Do not use home monitors on your baby to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- Home monitors do not reduce the risk of SIDS; they are useful only for alerting you to your baby’s needs.

- This reduces the chance that your baby will get flat spots and bald spots on their head.
- Do it ONLY while your baby is awake and supervised.
- To help prevent flat spots on the sides of your baby’s head, alternate the direction your baby is placed to sleep in the crib and move the mobile, mirror, or other objects of interest to the opposite side of the baby’s sleep and/or play area.

References
