

What causes SIDS?

The exact cause of SIDS is unknown, but it's thought to be down to a combination of factors.

Experts believe SIDS occurs at a particular stage in a baby's development and that it affects babies vulnerable to certain environmental stresses.

This vulnerability may be caused by being born prematurely or having a low birthweight, or because of other reasons that have not been identified yet.

Environmental stresses could include tobacco smoke, getting tangled in bedding, a minor illness or a breathing obstruction. There's also an association between sleeping with your baby on a sofa or chair and SIDS.

Babies who die of SIDS are thought to have problems in the way they respond to these stresses and how they regulate their heart rate, breathing and temperature.

Although the cause of SIDS is not fully understood, there are a number of things you can do to reduce the risk.

What can I do to help prevent SIDS?

Do

- always place your baby on their back to sleep
- place your baby in the "feet to foot" position – with their feet touching the end of the cot, Moses basket or pram
- keep your baby's head uncovered – tuck your baby's blanket securely under their arms so the blanket cannot move and cover their head
- keep your baby, or any baby you're caring for, in the same room as you while they're sleeping until they're at least 6 months old
- make sure there are no pillows or duvets near your baby if you share a bed with them
- keep other children and pets out of the bed if you share a bed with your baby
- use a mattress that's firm, flat, waterproof and in good condition
- breastfeed your baby, if you can – see [benefits of breastfeeding](#) for more information
- make sure you use a sling or baby-carrier safely – [The Lullaby Trust has more information](#)

Don't

- do not share a bed with your baby if you or your partner smoke or take recreational drugs, have had 2 or more units of alcohol or have taken medicine that causes drowsiness

- do not share a bed with your baby if they weighed under 2.5kg when they were born
- do not smoke during pregnancy or let anyone smoke in the same room as your baby – both before and after birth
- do not sleep on a sofa or armchair with your baby
- do not let your baby get too hot or too cold – a room temperature of 16C to 20C, with light bedding or a lightweight baby sleeping bag, will provide a comfortable sleeping environment for your baby

Reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

It's not known why some babies die suddenly and for no apparent reason from [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).

SIDS can affect babies aged up to 12 months old. Experts do know placing a baby to sleep on their back reduces the risk, and exposing a baby to cigarette smoke or allowing them to overheat increases the risk.

It's also known there's an association between sleeping with your baby on a sofa or chair and SIDS.

Follow the advice on this page to reduce the risks as much as possible.

How to reduce the risk of SIDS

To reduce the risk of SIDS:

- always place your baby on their back to sleep
- keep your baby, or any baby you're caring for, in the same room as you when they're sleeping until they're at least 6 months old
- keep your baby's head uncovered – tuck your baby's blanket under their arms so the blanket cannot move and cover their head
- if wearing your baby in a sling or carrier, make sure you use it safely
- place your baby in the "feet to foot" position, with their feet touching the end of the cot or Moses basket
- do not let your baby get too hot or cold
- never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair
- do not co-sleep with your baby if you (or anyone in the bed) smokes, has drunk alcohol or has taken drugs or medicine that make you feel drowsy
- do not smoke when you're pregnant or around your baby after they're born, and do not let anyone smoke in the same room as your baby

Place your baby on their back to sleep

Place your baby on their back to sleep from the very beginning for both day and night sleeps. This will reduce the risk of cot death.

Do not put your baby to sleep on their side or tummy.

Once your baby can roll over onto their front, and roll over again onto their back by themselves, there's no need to worry if they turn onto their tummy or side while sleeping.

Do not let your baby's head become covered

Babies whose heads are covered with bedding are at an increased risk of SIDS.

To prevent your baby wriggling down under the covers, place them in the "feet to foot" position. This means their feet are at the end of the crib, cot or Moses basket.

To put your baby in the feet to foot position:

- tuck the covers in securely under your baby's arms so they cannot slip over their head – use 1 or more layers of lightweight blankets
- use a baby mattress that's firm, flat, well-fitting, clean and waterproof on the outside – cover the mattress with a single sheet
- do not use duvets, quilts, baby nests, wedges, bedding rolls or pillows

Use a baby sling or carrier safely

If you use a sling or carrier, make sure you use it safely.

It's not safe to feed your baby while they are in a sling. If you need to feed your baby, take them out of the sling.

When using a sling or carrier do not let the material cover your baby's head.

The UK Sling Consortium recommends what is known as the "T.I.C.K.S. rules for safe babywearing":

- Tight – slings and carriers should be kept tight enough to hug your baby close to your body
- In view – you should be able to see your baby's face at all times
- Close – the sling should keep your baby close enough to kiss their head
- Keep – keep your baby's chin off their chest
- Support – support your baby's back so it is comfortably upright

Find out more about how to safely use baby carriers and slings:

- [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents \(RoSPA\): baby slings](#)
- [The Lullaby Trust: how to use a sling](#)

Do not let your baby get too hot or too cold

Overheating can increase the risk of SIDS. Babies can overheat because of too much bedding or clothing, or because the room is too hot.

- When you check your baby, make sure they're not too hot. If your baby is sweating or their tummy feels hot to the touch, take off some of the bedding. Do not worry if their hands or feet feel cool – this is normal.
- It's easier to adjust for the temperature by using layers of lightweight blankets. Remember, a folded blanket counts as 2 blankets. Lightweight, well-fitting baby sleeping bags are a good choice, too.
- Babies do not need hot rooms. All-night heating is rarely necessary. Keep the room at a temperature that's comfortable – about 16 to 20C is ideal.
- If it's very warm, your baby may not need any bedclothes other than a sheet.
- Even in winter, most babies who are unwell or feverish do not need extra clothes.
- Babies should never sleep with a hot water bottle or electric blanket, next to a radiator, heater or fire, or in direct sunshine.
- Babies lose excess heat through their heads, so make sure their heads cannot be covered by bedclothes, slings or carriers while they're asleep.
- Remove hats and extra clothing as soon as you come indoors or enter a warm car, bus or train, even if it means waking your baby.
- Do not cover your baby's pram or buggy with blankets or any other cover that stops air circulating. This can lead to overheating and makes it difficult for you to monitor your baby's temperature.

Be safe if you share a bed with your baby

If you share a bed with your baby (co-sleeping), you should:

- make sure they sleep on a firm, flat mattress lying on their back
- not have any pillows or duvets near them
- not have other babies, children or pets in the bed at the same time
- not leave them alone in an adult bed (if there is not an adult in bed with them, put them in a crib, cot or Moses basket)

Do not share a bed with your baby if they were born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or if they had a low birthweight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb).

You should also not share a bed with your baby if you or your partner:

- smoke (no matter where or when you smoke and even if you never smoke in bed)
- have had 2 or more units of alcohol
- have taken recreational drugs
- have taken medicine that causes drowsiness

Never sleep with a baby on a sofa or armchair

It's lovely to have your baby with you for a cuddle or a feed, but sleeping with your baby on a sofa or armchair is linked to a higher risk of SIDS.

It's safest to put your baby back in their cot before you go to sleep.

Do not let anyone smoke near your baby

Babies exposed to cigarette smoke before and after birth are at an increased risk of SIDS. Do not let anyone smoke in the house, including visitors.

Ask anyone who needs to smoke to go outside. Do not take your baby into smoky places.

If you smoke, sharing a bed with your baby increases the risk of SIDS.

[Get help and support if you want to quit smoking](#)

Feeding, dummies and SIDS

Breastfeeding your baby reduces the risk of SIDS.

It's possible that using a dummy at the start of a sleep also reduces the risk of SIDS. But the evidence is not strong and not all experts agree that dummies should be promoted.

If you're breastfeeding, do not use a dummy until feeding is well established. This is usually when your baby is around 1 month old.

Stop giving them a dummy when they're between 6 and 12 months old.

Car seats

Do not let your baby stay in a car seat for too long. Car seats should only be used to keep your baby safe while travelling.

Take your baby out of the car seat as soon as you get to where you're going. Place them on a firm, flat surface to sleep.

Get medical help quickly if your baby is unwell

Babies often have minor illnesses that you do not need to worry about.

Give your baby plenty of fluids to drink and do not let them get too hot. If your baby sleeps a lot, wake them up regularly for a drink. If your baby is breastfed, continue to breastfeed as normal.

It can be difficult to judge whether an illness is more serious and needs urgent medical attention. See [spotting signs of serious illness in a baby or toddler](#) for guidance on when to get help.

Make sure your baby is up to date with their [routine NHS vaccinations](#). These provide protection against childhood illnesses that may increase the risk of SIDS.