



Safe Sleeping for Babies

In the early weeks of life, babies sleep for about 16 hours a day. Planning where your baby can sleep safely is an important decision.

Creating a safe sleeping environment for your baby will reduce the risk of injuries and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). For more information, see [HealthLink BC File #46 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).

It is important for parents, babysitters and caregivers to be informed about safe sleeping practices for babies.

What can I do to keep my baby safe during sleep?

Put your baby to sleep on his or her back on the firm and flat surface of a safety-approved crib.

Babies should always be placed on their backs to sleep. Healthy babies and newborns do not choke or have any problems from sleeping on their backs.

You do not need to force babies to sleep on their backs when they can turn on their own from back to stomach, usually at 5 to 7 months of age. You should still put your baby to sleep on his or her back until 12 months of age.

Dress your baby in a sleeper and light blanket for sleep and keep the room cool. Never cover your baby's face or head with blankets.

Do not use items that prop the baby in one position during sleep. If your baby has a health condition that requires a different position for sleep, discuss safe options to meet your baby's needs with your doctor.

When a baby is awake, some 'tummy time' lying on his or her stomach is necessary for healthy development. This also prevents temporary flat spots that may develop on the back of a baby's head.

Never let a baby sleep on a soft mattress or surface, couch, air mattress, pillow, duvet or quilt, or on a waterbed.

Do not leave your baby sleeping in a car seat, stroller, baby swing, or bouncer seat if you are not staying near and watching your baby. These are not safe sleeping places.

Put your baby to sleep in a safety-approved crib.

Babies should always sleep in a crib that meets the federal government's Cribs and Cradles Regulations and a crib made after 1986.

Put the crib together using the manufacturer's instructions, and do not change the crib in any way.

To prevent a baby from being trapped or suffocated, check and be sure:

- The crib mattress fits the frame. There should be no gaps bigger than 3 cm between the mattress and frame when the mattress pushes into the corners of the crib.
- The crib bars are less than 6 cm apart.
- Make sure there are no knobs or items on a crib that could catch a baby's clothing. If a baby tries to climb out of a crib and catches his or her clothing, the baby could strangle.

Do not place items in or around your baby's crib.

- Keep stuffed toys and pillows out of the crib.
- Do not use crib bumper pads or lambskin.
- Be sure there are no straps, cords or window blinds near the baby's crib.

Do not share a bed with your baby.

Babies who sleep in their own safety-approved cribs are much safer than when they share a bed. They should always sleep in a crib until 12 months of age.

Bed-sharing is a common practice for many families, and many people around the world believe that it is natural to sleep with young infants. However, babies who share a bed or sleep surface with adults, older siblings, other children or pets are at risk of suffocation from being laid on.

Bed-sharing is unsafe if the parent is very tired, or under the effects of medications or alcohol, or overweight. The risk of injuries or SIDS is greater for the baby when sharing a bed with a person who may smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs, which can make them less responsive. Injuries from bed-sharing are preventable.

Share a room with your baby

Sharing a room helps protect your baby against SIDS. It is a safer sleeping arrangement than sharing a bed.

You can help protect your baby by sharing a room or sleeping close to your baby, within arms reach but not on the same bed or sleeping surface. For example, your baby's crib can be placed beside your bed.

Babies who share a room with parents and sleep in their own cribs are safer than when they share a bed.

Do not use alcohol or drugs

The use of certain drugs or substances during and after pregnancy is strongly discouraged. This includes alcohol, marijuana, crack, cocaine, heroin, and others. Evidence suggests that the use of these substances may increase the risk of SIDS.

If you or your partner need support to stop using alcohol or drugs, call your local public health unit to find out about services in your area. You can also call the Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service: in Greater Vancouver call 604-660-9383, and in B.C. call toll-free 1-800-663-1441.

Do not smoke around your baby.

The risk of SIDS increases when bed-sharing is practiced and babies are also exposed to second-hand smoke.

For more information, speak with your public health nurse or doctor. You can also ask for a copy of [Baby's Best Chance](#).

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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