

Enjoy your baby

Cot death is uncommon and becomes rare after the age of 5 months - about the time when babies are able to roll over and move a bit more. Don't let the worry of cot death spoil the precious time of getting to know your baby. But, the measures listed above reduce the small risk of cot death. Perhaps the most important thing is simply to remember to put your baby on their back when you place them down to sleep. This is what an American child health institute's 'Back to Sleep' campaign promotes.

Breast feeding

Research has shown that breast-fed babies have a lower risk of cot death compared to formula-fed babies. This may be partly explained by the fact that breast-fed babies, on average, have fewer illnesses compared to formula-fed babies. But there may be other factors. Breast-feeding also provides other advantages to both baby and mother. See the Breast-feeding leaflet for more information.

Baby Comfort

A campaign resulted in most parents now knowing that the safest position for a young baby to sleep is on their back.

- Ensure a smoke-free home for your baby.
- Symptoms of illness - see a doctor if your baby appears unwell.
- Aim for breast-feeding.

The newer baby 'sleeping bags' mean you do not have to use any additional bedding for your baby. The baby 'wears' the sleeping bag - a bit like a pinafore dress with the bottom sewn up. It is usually fastened with a zip and/or poppers. They come in different 'tog' weights, just like a normal duvet. This means you can choose a sleeping bag of the appropriate warmth depending on whether it is summer or winter, or whether you live in a hot or cold climate. Your baby can wear a vest, baby grow or pyjamas, again depending on the warmth of the room in which they sleep. The advantage of sleeping bags is that your baby cannot bury himself or herself under the covers; sleeping bags also mean that your baby cannot pull their covers off in the night and get too cold. Sleeping bags can also prevent a younger baby from rolling on to his or her front or side. The sleeping bags are sized according to age and your baby must be a minimum weight to wear one - consult the manufacturers' labels for more information. This means they are usually not suitable for newborns - only for babies a few months old. Many parents now choose sleeping bags for their babies, although they can be quite expensive.

Babies need to be warm, but not too warm. Being too warm increases the risk of cot death. Have the room at a temperature that is comfortable for you. If your baby is sweating or feels hot then they are too warm. Do not place a baby's cot next to a heater or radiator, or in direct sunlight, and don't use hot water bottles, electric blankets, etc.

When you sleep, share a room with your baby - but not your bed

A cot or crib next to your bed is the best place for your baby to sleep until they are at least 6 months' old.

A dummy can reduce the risk of cot death. It is not clear how, but it seems to help. Therefore, consider offering your baby a dummy at the start of each episode of sleep. However, if you breast-feed, do not start to use a dummy until you are well established with breast-feeding. This is normally when the baby is about one month old. Also, it is common to stop using a dummy when the baby is about 6-12 months old, as prolonged use of a dummy may possibly lead to dental and/or speech problems.

Don't force a dummy on a baby who does not want one. If the dummy falls out when a baby is asleep, just leave it out. Also, never coat a dummy with anything such as sweet liquids or sugar. Clean and replace dummies regularly.

If any of the above occur take your baby to a doctor

- Vomiting, especially bile (green) vomit.
- Takes less fluids (milk feed) and/or makes less urine than usual.
- High-pitched or unusual cry.
- Drowsiness, floppiness or less responsive than usual.

- Wheezy, grunting, fast or difficult breathing.
- High fever or sweating a lot.
- Looks pale or blue.
- Blood in the nappies.
- Rash.
- Premature infants require extra vitamin C for normal tyrosine metabolism (tyrosine is the thyroxine precursor).
- Immunisation protects against serious illness. Babies who are fully immunised are less at risk of cot death.

There is an increased risk when bed-sharing if

- Your baby was born prematurely, had a low birthweight, or is less than 3 months old.
- You smoke - or your partner smokes - even if you do not smoke in the home.
- You are very tired or you are taking medication that can make you drowsy.
- You have taken any alcohol or drugs.

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