



FROM  
YOUR DOCTOR

# Safe sleeping for your baby

**C**ongratulations on your new baby! You're probably overwhelmed with new responsibilities, but it's important to take a few moments to learn how to keep your baby safe during sleep. Parents often worry about SIDS—**S**udden **I**nfant **D**eath **S**yndrome—a condition that causes infants to die during sleep.

- No one knows what causes SIDS
- 85% of babies who die of SIDS are 2-4 months old, and 95% are younger than 6 months
- Most babies who die of SIDS seem healthy beforehand
- Of every 1,000 babies born, one dies of SIDS.



If you have any questions about your baby's sleep position or health, first talk to your doctor. For more information about the "Back to Sleep" campaign, call free of charge, (800) 505-CRIB. Or you can write to Back to Sleep, Box 29111, Washington, DC 20040.

## Which baby will get SIDS?

It's impossible to predict which babies will have SIDS. We do know that certain things increase the risk of SIDS. Some medical conditions increase the risk, and your doctor will tell you if your baby has one of these and what steps should be taken. Other factors that make SIDS more likely include

- Alcohol and drug use by the mother during pregnancy
- Exposure to cigarette smoke
- Soft bedding, including quilts, crib bumpers, sheepskins,

pillows, and beanbag cushions

- Putting the baby to sleep facing down

As you can see, these are factors that you can control. You shouldn't use recreational drugs anyway, but if you're breastfeeding, you should know that drugs like cocaine get into breast milk and may increase the baby's risk of SIDS. (In general, breastfeeding is a good idea because it actually decreases the risk of SIDS.) And don't let anyone smoke near your baby.

No comforters?

No crib bumpers?

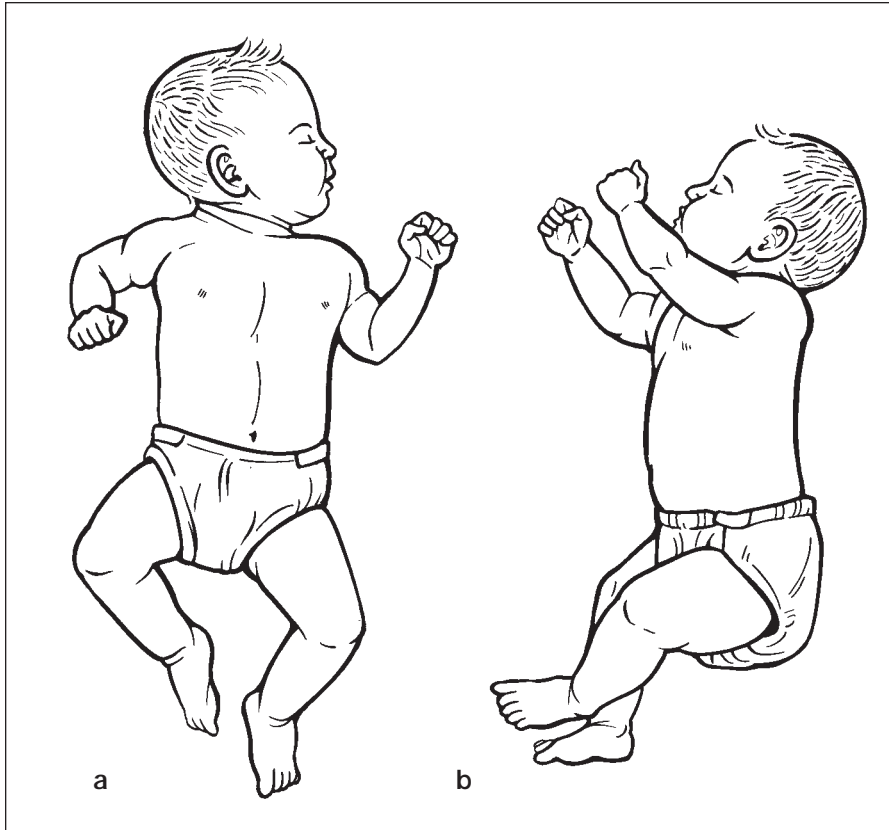
That's right. Coordinated sets that include pillows, quilts, and crib bumpers look great in the store, and they are popular baby shower gifts. *Don't use them!* A new baby can suffocate when lying face down on a pillow, quilt, sheepskin, beanbag cushion, or other soft bedding. Crib bumpers can be dangerous if the baby's head gets wedged between the bumper and the mattress.

Instead, choose a firm mattress that the baby can't sink into. *Never let a baby sleep on a water bed!* Cover her with a light blanket. Don't use heavy blankets.

- If the crib is new, it will have a label stating that it meets federal safety standards. If you have a hand-me-down crib, be sure the crib bars are no more than 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches apart.
- If you can fit more than two fingers between the edge of the mattress and the crib sides, fill the space with a rolled towel.
- Don't put stuffed animals in the crib.
- Don't let the baby sleep in your bed. If the baby comes into your bed to breastfeed, be sure to take him back to his crib when he's done.

# Safe sleeping for your baby

*continued*



**Newborns are safest** sleeping on their backs (a). Placing a baby to sleep on her stomach increases her chances of SIDS, for reasons that doctors don't yet understand. You may also place the baby on her side (b).

## Most important . . .

*Babies should go to sleep on their backs, NOT their tummies.* No one knows why this is true, but the evidence is strong. After doctors made this recommendation in Australia, the SIDS rate dropped by 50%. Dramatic drops in the SIDS rate have also been seen in other places where parents were instructed to put babies to sleep on their backs, including England and Washington State. Do this until the baby is at least 6 months old.

Parents often worry that a baby who is sleeping on her back will gag or suffocate if she spits up or vomits. This is called aspiration. Doctors have studied this, and they found that aspiration is actually *less* common in babies who sleep on their backs.

If you have more questions about safe sleeping for babies, ask your doctor, or contact The SIDS Alliance, 1314 Bedford Ave., Suite 210, Baltimore, MD 21208; (800) 221-SIDS.