

# Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

**S**udden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year. Most SIDS deaths occur in babies who are between 2 and 4 months old. In the United States, approximately 4500 infants die each year of SIDS. This Patient Page is based on one published in the December 4, 2002, issue of JAMA.

## SIDS BASICS

Although more research is needed, it is currently believed that SIDS results when a baby's body has difficulty regulating blood pressure, breathing, or temperature (or a combination of these things) because of an underlying vulnerability or developmental problem. When stressed by outside factors, including being put to sleep on their stomach, these babies can die of SIDS.

One thing parents can do to help prevent SIDS is to put babies to sleep on their back, not stomach. This helps babies breathe more easily and may prevent them from breathing their own exhaled air, which can collect under the baby's nose, especially if the baby is snuggling with a blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal. Babies should sleep in a room that is adequately warm (but not too hot).



## HOW TO DECREASE THE RISK OF SIDS

- Always place babies "back to sleep" (sleeping on back rather than stomach)
- Place babies on firm (not soft) bedding
- Keep pillows, blankets, and stuffed animals out of the crib
- Use pacifiers
- Prevent babies from getting too hot
- Do not expose pregnant women or babies to cigarette smoke
- Do not allow babies to sleep with parents in parents' beds or on couches

Babies should never be put to sleep on adult furniture, such as sofas or beds, because they can become trapped in crevices or corners or under bedsheets and suffocate. Parents often worry that babies' heads will become flat in the back, but this can be prevented by giving babies "tummy time" while they are awake and being watched by a caregiver.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatrics  
HealthyChildren  
[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/parents)

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