

Some Basic Facts about SIDS:

- SIDS is a definite medical entity and is the major cause of death in infants after the first month of life.
- SIDS claims the lives of thousands of American babies each year ... nearly one baby for every 1,000 live births.
- SIDS victims appear to be healthy prior to death.
- Currently, SIDS cannot be predicted or prevented, even by a physician.
- There appears to be no suffering; death occurs very rapidly, usually during sleep.

What SIDS is *Not*:

- SIDS is *not* caused by external suffocation.
- SIDS is *not* caused by vomiting and choking.
- SIDS is *not* contagious.
- SIDS does *not* cause pain or suffering in the infant.
- SIDS can *not* be predicted at this time.
- SIDS is *not* new. It is referenced in the Old Testament (1 Kings 3:19).



SIDS Network
... Making a Difference

SIDS Information Web Site
<http://sids-network.org>

A world of information and support!

PO Box 267
Ledyard, CT 06339

E-mail: sidsnet1@sids-network.org

Facts About Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and Reducing the Risks for SIDS



Many more children die of SIDS in a year than all who die of cancer, heart disease, pneumonia, child abuse, AIDS, cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy combined . . .

What is SIDS?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is a medical term that describes the sudden death of an infant which remains unexplained after all known and possible causes have been carefully ruled out through autopsy, death scene investigation, and review of the medical history. SIDS is responsible for more deaths than any other cause in childhood for babies one month to one year of age, claiming thousands of victims in the United States each year - *about one baby for every 1,000 live births*. It strikes families of all races, ethnic and socioeconomic origins without warning; neither parent nor physician can predict that something is going wrong. In fact, most SIDS victims *appear healthy* prior to death.

What Causes SIDS?

While there are still no adequate medical explanations for SIDS deaths, current theories include: (1) stress in a normal baby, caused by infection or other factors; (2) a birth defect; (3) failure to develop; and/or (4) a critical period when *all* babies are especially vulnerable, such as a time of rapid growth.

Many new studies have been launched to learn how and why SIDS occurs. Scientists are exploring the development and function of the nervous system, the brain, the heart, breathing and sleep patterns, body chemical balances, autopsy findings, and environmental factors. It is likely that SIDS, like many other medical disorders, will eventually have *more than one explanation*.

Can SIDS Be Prevented?

No, not yet. But, some recent studies have begun to isolate several risk factors which, though not causes of SIDS in and of themselves, may play a role in *some* cases. We share the following information with you in the interest of providing parents with the latest medical evidence from research in the U.S. and other countries in the hope of giving your baby the best possible chance to thrive. (*It is important that, since the causes of SIDS remain unknown, SIDS parents and others refrain from concluding that child care practices may have caused their baby's death.*)

Reducing The Risks For SIDS Some Steps Parents Can Take

Place your baby on the **back to sleep**.

➤The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that healthy, full term infants sleep on their back to reduce the risk for SIDS. This is considered to be primarily important during the first six months of age, when a baby's risk of SIDS is greatest. It does not apply to certain infants with breathing problems or infants with excessive spitting up after feeding. Parents should discuss this recommendation with their baby's doctor.

Stop smoking around the baby.

➤Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has long been associated with women who smoke during pregnancy. A recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics demonstrates that women who quit smoking but then resume smoking after delivery put their babies at risk for SIDS, too. Findings from the survey show that babies exposed to smoke only after birth were *twice* as likely to die from SIDS as those whose mothers did not smoke at all. And, constant smoke exposure both during and after pregnancy *tripled* a baby's risk for SIDS.

Use **firm bedding** materials.

➤In response to recent research, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued a series of advisories for parents on the hazards posed to infants sleeping on beanbag cushions, sheepskins, foam pads, foam sofa cushions, synthetic filled adult pillows and foam pads covered with comforters. Waterbeds should also be avoided. Parents are advised to use a firm, flat mattress in a safety approved crib for their baby's sleep.

Avoid overheating, especially when your baby is ill.

➤SIDS has been associated with the presence of colds and infections, although colds are not more common among babies

who die of SIDS than babies in general. Now, research findings indicate that overheating - too much clothing, too heavy bedding, and too warm a room - may greatly increase the risk of SIDS for a baby with a cold or infection. Signs that your baby may be overheated include sweating, damp hair, heat rash, rapid breathing, restlessness, and sometimes fever. To help your baby regulate his or her temperature, some pediatricians recommend maintaining consistent indoor temperatures of 68 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit; and dressing your baby in as much or as little as you would wear.

If possible, **breast-feed** your baby.

➤Studies by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) show that babies who died of SIDS were less likely to be breast-fed. Potential advantages to breast-feeding your baby include prevention of gastrointestinal and respiratory illness, infections and certain immunologic disorders.

Other **important factors**.

➤Statistics tell us that seasonality (i.e. the cold weather months), maternal age (i.e. the younger the mother, the greater the risk), and baby's sex (i.e. boys are at higher risk than girls) are among the factors which must be considered. Baby's age is another risk factor. SIDS occurs most frequently in infants two to four months old; nearly 90% of the babies who die of SIDS are under six months of age. We also know that there is a higher incidence of SIDS for premature and low-birthweight infants, twins and triplets.

Maintaining good prenatal care and constant communication with your baby's doctor about changes in your baby's behavior and health are of the utmost importance.

What is Meant by Risk Factors?

Risk factors by themselves do not cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, but can have a negative effect on infant well-being. In fact, as many as two thirds of SIDS victims have no known risk factors, and, most babies with one or more of these risk factors will not become SIDS victims.

Therefore, while doctors are hopeful that following the recommendations we have described may reduce the risk of SIDS, we must understand that *following the recommendations faithfully will still not prevent all SIDS deaths*. Research must continue if we are to discover how and why SIDS occurs, and expand upon these and other risk factors.