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).
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 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.