



## Children's Health

---

# Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Sudden infant death syndrome, also referred to as SIDS and crib death, strikes suddenly, killing seemingly healthy infants during their sleep. The facts are as perplexing as the deaths.

- ▶ SIDS rarely occurs before 2 weeks or after 6 months of age.
- ▶ Male babies are more likely to die than females.
- ▶ Deaths occur most often during the winter months.

---

#### KNOWN RISK FACTORS FOR SIDS

- premature or low-birth-weight infants*
- infants whose mothers smoked or used drugs during pregnancy*
- infants who have had a sibling die of SIDS*
- infants who have stopped breathing and have been resuscitated*
- infants with low Apgar scores (the measurement of certain vital signs at birth)*

---

#### WHAT'S KNOWN ABOUT SIDS

Prior to 1995, about 70 percent of infants slept on their stomachs. New research suggests that SIDS is more common in cultures where infants are placed on their stomachs to sleep. When doctors in England, New Zealand, Australia and Norway

recommended changing infant sleeping positions from stomach to back or side, the SIDS rate decreased dramatically. Many doctors believe that the part of the brain that's responsible for awakening hasn't fully developed in SIDS infants. If the airway becomes blocked in these infants, their brains fail to wake them up and allow them to move so breathing can resume. A change of sleep position is the only factor that has led to a drop in the SIDS death rate so far. Mothers with premature or low-birth-weight infants should consult their children's doctors about sleep positions and monitoring.

#### WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR INFANT'S RISK

- ▶ Breast-feed your infant. Breast-fed babies have a lower rate of SIDS than bottle-fed babies.
- ▶ Have your infant sleep on a firm surface to prevent suffocation.
- ▶ Keep your infant's crib clear of soft toys, pillows and bulky quilts to prevent smothering.
- ▶ Put your infant to sleep on his or her back or side.
- ▶ Keep your infant away from tobacco smoke.
- ▶ Avoid overheating your infant's room. If the temperature feels OK to an adult, it's OK for the infant.
- ▶ Take care of yourself during pregnancy. Eat right and exercise carefully. Avoid smoking, drinking or using drugs. Smoking by mothers during pregnancy often results in low birth weight babies.