

Back to sleep



You should always place your baby on their back to sleep and not on their front or side

Placing your baby on their back to sleep is one of our key pieces of advice to lower the chance of SIDS. Although in the past babies were slept on their fronts, the change in advice in 1990 to put babies on their backs is one of the main reasons why sudden infant death dropped by more than half between 1989 (where there were 1,545 SIDS cases in the UK), to 1992 (where there were 647 cases in the UK). We know that sleeping your baby on their side also increases the chance of SIDS

It is important that you always put your baby on their back as part of their regular sleep routine - the chance of SIDS is particularly high for babies who are sometimes placed on their front or side

The best way to make sure your baby sleeps on their back is to do this from day one, and always place them to sleep on their back for every day and night sleep. It is also important that you keep the same routine for your baby, as babies who are normally slept on their backs but sometimes slept on their fronts are at a greater risk of SIDS

Once your baby can roll from back to front and back again, on their own, they can be left to find their own position to sleep

Parents are often worried when their baby learns to roll, and finds a comfortable sleeping position on their side or front. Once a baby can move themselves from their back to their front and back again by themselves, they will be able to find their own sleeping position. The first few times they roll onto their tummy, you might like to gently turn them back, but do not feel you have to get up all night to check. Give them some time to play on their tummy while they are awake to help their development, but make sure you supervise them while they are on their front

Sleeping your baby on their front or side greatly increases the chance of SIDS



Research corner

There is substantial evidence from all around the world to show that sleeping a baby on their back (known as supine position) at the beginning of every sleep period significantly reduces the risk of SIDS. However, sleeping an infant prone (on its front) or side is associated with a significantly increased risk of SIDS. For example, one major UK study found that the risk of a SIDS death for infants placed prone was over 6 times the risk for those infants placed supine, even where other factors were taken into account. Studies have also shown that infants who usually sleep on their back but are then placed on the front or side to sleep are at a particularly high risk. It is therefore important that babies are put on their backs consistently as part of their regular sleep routine.

Frequently asked questions



My baby was born prematurely and slept on her front in hospital, is it okay to sleep her on her front at home as well?

Some babies who were born very prematurely and spent some time in a neonatal unit may have been slept on their fronts for medical reasons. Remember that babies in neonatal units are under constant supervision. By the time your baby comes home they should be sleeping on their back. Babies may find it hard to adjust from a sleeping position they have been used to, so persevere and do speak to your paediatrician if you are concerned. Front-sleeping should only be continued for on-going medical reasons on the advice of your paediatrician

Is a baby sleeping on their back more likely to choke on their own vomit?

Some parents worry that by sleeping their baby on the back they will be at a greater risk of choking on their own vomit. However, no research has found this to be the case, and we now know that babies are far safer sleeping on their backs



My mum says I was slept on my front and that was the advice then, why has it changed?

Many parents reading this factsheet will have been slept on their tummies as babies, as that was the advice before 1991. However, research has since shown that the chance of SIDS is much higher when a baby is placed on their front to sleep. We know that in the early 1990s, there were thousands of babies worldwide dying suddenly and unexpectedly every year. The reason the number of deaths is much lower now, is due to the new advice being followed by parents, such as lying babies on their backs to sleep

My baby loves sleeping on his front, how do we change to his back without him waking up?

We sometimes get calls from parents who say their baby prefers sleeping on their front. If a baby is given a choice, they may well prefer this position, but unfortunately it is not a safe one! This is why we encourage all parents to follow back-sleeping from day one. Getting your baby to stick to sleeping on their back once if they have tried sleeping on their front might be difficult, but is made easier if your baby is always put down to sleep whilst awake rather than allowing your baby to fall asleep in your arms. Keep going, they will eventually get used to it



Is sleeping a baby on their front better for babies with reflux?

All babies should be slept on their backs unless there is medical advice saying something different. If your baby has reflux, or any other on-going health condition, speak to your doctor about the best care for them. You should not sleep your baby on their front unless you have been advised to do so by a medical professional

Will a sleep positioner help keep my baby on their back to sleep and therefore lower the risk of SIDS?

There is no need to use any type of equipment or rolled up blankets to keep your baby in one position unless you have been advised by a health professional for a specific medical condition. It is much safer for your baby to be in their cot with just the sheets or blankets, and no extras which could be pulled over their face or cause an accident. As babies grow stronger they learn to move and roll and this is fine