

# Safer sleep advice

For premature and low  
birthweight babies



**Babies who are born prematurely (before 37 weeks) or who weighed less than 5.5 pounds (2.5kgs) at birth have a greater risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).**

**It is even more important that safer sleep advice is followed if your baby was born prematurely or was a low birth weight. This includes twins and multiples born prematurely, or of low birth weight.**

We do not know what causes SIDS. However, we do know you can greatly lower the risk of SIDS by following safer sleep advice.

**Safer sleep advice is for babies up to one year old. If your baby was born prematurely, then you should follow safer sleep advice for a year from their due date, rather than when they were born.**



## Preparing to come home

**Babies in neonatal units are under constant supervision. How your baby sleeps in hospital can be different to how they should sleep at home. In neonatal units, babies may sleep on their fronts, wear hats, or have rolled-up towels in their incubator.**

However, before going home, the neonatal unit should get your baby used to sleeping on their back on a firm, flat mattress. The cot should be kept clear of towels, pillows or duvets, cot bumpers, soft toys, loose bedding. It should also be clear of products keeping your baby in one sleeping position (such as wedges, straps, pods or nests). You only need sheets, a blanket or a baby sleeping bag.

If you choose to use a baby sleeping bag, ensure it is the correct fit, so baby cannot slip inside and is the correct tog for the room temperature. Most sleep bags can be used once a baby is 8.8 pounds or 4kg, but check the guidance which comes with the sleep bag you are using.

## Back to sleep

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**The safest place for your baby to sleep for the first six months is in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as you.**

Some babies who were born very prematurely and have spent some time in neonatal unit may have been sleeping on their fronts for medical reasons. When you get home, you should sleep your baby on their back. Babies may find it hard to get used to a new sleeping position at first, but keep putting your baby onto their back. Speak with your health visitor, neonatal outreach team or GP if you are worried about how they are coping with this. Unless you have been told to do so by your baby's doctor because of a medical condition, don't use any equipment or rolled up blankets to keep them in one position.

Babies who need to be given oxygen at home should sleep on their backs. You may have been told to increase the amount of oxygen if they are on their back instead of their front. This is still the safest way for them to sleep.

## Hats

Premature babies on neonatal units often sleep with hats on. Once your baby comes home they do not need to wear a hat indoors. Wearing a hat means your baby can't release heat. The risk of SIDS is higher in babies who get too hot.



## Slings / baby carrier safety

Babies that are born premature or of low birth weight are particularly vulnerable to SIDS. It's very important, if you choose to use a sling or baby carrier, that you follow the TICKS guidelines from the UK Sling Consortium:

**Tight**  
**In view at all times**  
**Close enough to kiss**  
**Keep chin off the chest**  
**Supported back**

This is to ensure that your baby's breathing tube (airway) is kept clear. It allows you to check that they are able to breathe easily and are not overheating.



## Temperature

**If a baby gets too hot, their risk of SIDS can increase. It's important to make sure that a baby doesn't become too cold. But if a baby is wearing lots of layers or the room is too warm, they can get too hot.**

A nursery thermometer will help you to make sure every room where your baby sleeps is at the right temperature. Keep the temperature between 16 and 20°C. This will be cooler than the neonatal unit, as babies on a neonatal unit often find it harder to keep warm. Your baby will not be allowed to go home until they can maintain their own temperature.

Check your baby regularly to make sure that they're not too hot or cold. You can do this by feeling the back of their neck or chest. Don't use their hands or feet to check, as it's usual for them to feel colder than the rest of their body. It is also important to make sure that your baby's head is uncovered while they sleep, so take off hats indoors.

To check your baby's temperature, use a digital thermometer and place this under their armpit. A normal temperature in babies and children is about 36.4°C (97.5F), but this can vary slightly. A fever is usually considered to be a temperature of 38°C (100.4F) or above.

If your baby is too hot, take some layers off and check again. If your baby is too cold, add more layers. If they seem unwell, or don't warm up if cold, phone your doctor. If you get an answerphone message, call the number given on the message or call NHS 111. Call 999 if your baby is in difficulty or in an emergency.

You may also find our Baby Check app useful. The Lullaby Trust's Baby Check app helps parents decide whether their baby needs to see a doctor. Download for free via the Apple App Store, Google Play or visit [www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/baby-check-app/](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/baby-check-app/) for more information.

**Check baby's temperature to make sure they are not too hot**



## Car seats / transportation

Having a car seat for your baby is a legal requirement when travelling, even for a short trip from the hospital. Ensure the car seat fits both your car and your baby, especially if they are small when leaving the hospital.



Check with neonatal unit staff if they believe it is safe for your baby to travel home in a car seat. Your baby may need a 'car seat challenge' at the unit, to confirm they fit properly.

Many car seats don't allow babies to lie flat, which can cause their head to flop and make breathing harder. Therefore, babies shouldn't stay in car seats for long periods.

Avoid travelling in cars with pre-term and young babies for long distances. Research has found pre-term and young babies may be at risk of breathing difficulties if travelling in an upright position in car seats for a long period of time. To avoid overheating and keep their airway clear, take them out of the car seat when not in the car and place them on a firm, flat surface such as a cot or Moses basket.

## Smoking

Smoking both during pregnancy and after birth greatly increases the risk of SIDS. Quitting smoking is one of the most important things you can do for your baby. You should also keep your baby out of smoky areas and don't let people smoke near your baby. Keep your home, car and other places your baby spends time smoke-free. For advice and support visit the NHS website. In England, contact 0300 123 1044, in Scotland, contact 0800 84 84 84, in Wales, contact 0800 085 2219.



## Reflux

Babies with reflux should still sleep flat on their backs. It may be best to talk to your health visitor or GP if you are worried about your baby's health or crying. Sometimes babies are given medication for reflux.

## Co-sleeping

Research has shown that babies who were born prematurely or at a low birth weight have a significantly higher risk of SIDS if baby sleeps whilst sharing a bed, chair or sofa with a sleeping adult. Co-sleeping with a premature or low birth weight baby is therefore not recommended at all. This guidance applies for a year from your baby's due date. It's important to keep your baby's bed in the same room as you for at least six months, or six months past baby's due date if they were premature. You might wish to think about what sort of cot, crib or Moses basket would help you keep your baby close. It's a good idea to be prepared for when you are really tired so that your baby has a separate, safer sleeping place.

## Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has been shown to significantly lower the risk of SIDS. Breastfeeding for even a few days is better than none, but most authorities recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed for at least six months. The Department of Health and Social Care recommends that breastfeeding is continued, with the addition of appropriate weaning foods, for as long as the parent and baby want.



Premature babies are at greater risk of infection. Breastmilk protects your baby from many infections and diseases. Breastfeeding your baby all the time will lower the chance of infection or SIDS. But by breastfeeding even some of the time, you can help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Breastfeeding can be hard and sometimes it isn't possible to breastfeed directly if your baby was born early. You could try expressing your breastmilk using a pump. If you are struggling, your midwife or health visitor can support you.

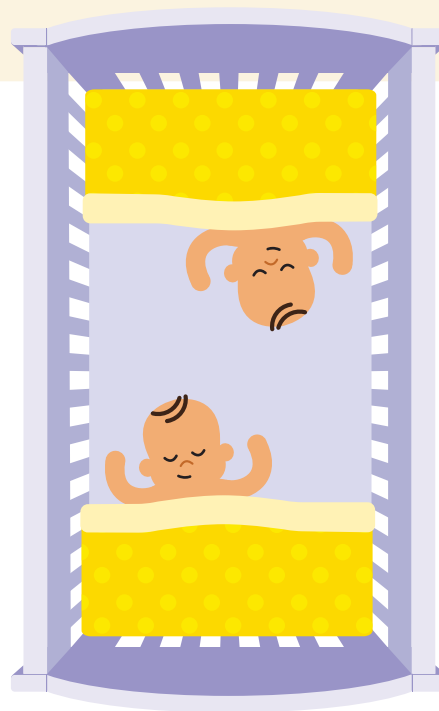
The colostrum (first milk produced in the first days after giving birth) contains the most infection fighting antibodies. The neonatal team can help work out how this can be given to your baby.

While skin-to-skin has many benefits, such as helping you to bond with your baby, this should only be done when you are awake.

## Twins and multiples

Premature or low birth weight multiples are often slept closely together on the neonatal unit. This is to replicate how they were in the womb, and help them develop important things like heart rate and breathing.

At The Lullaby Trust, we suggest co-bedding twins, triplets and more in the same cot. This allows you to share a room with them if you don't have enough space for multiple cots. Sharing a room with your babies is a really important step you can take to reduce the risk of SIDS.



For more information, go to the Twins Trust website.

However, there are other reasons you might want to co-bed your twins, triplets or multiples that you might want to look into. Some research suggests that putting twins or multiples in the same cot can help them regulate their body temperatures and sleep cycles, and soothe them.

### Things to know about co-bedding multiple babies:

- Only place them side-by-side in a cot in the early weeks, when they can't roll over or onto each other. Make sure they are not close enough to touch and block each other's breathing.
- Don't use rolled up towels, pillows or anything else between their bodies and heads and the use of cot dividers is not recommended. These can be dangerous for your babies.
- It might be good to start sleeping them at opposite ends of their cot from the beginning.
- This means they'll both be in the 'feet to foot' position (feet against the foot of the cot) with their own bedding firmly tucked in. Baby sleeping bags are a good option, and most can be used once a baby is 8.8 pounds or 4kg. But check the guidance which comes with the sleep bag you're using.
- Once **any** of your babies have learnt to roll, move them to their own cot. This stops one baby from blocking the breathing of the other, or causing an accident.
- We would not advise placing your twins or multiples in the same Moses basket or crib, even when they are very small. This is to make sure they don't overheat or block each other's breathing, which can increase the risk of SIDS.

**Bliss**  
for babies born  
premature or sick

**Twins  
trust.** We support  
twins, triplets  
and more...

For more  
information visit:  
[lullabytrust.org.uk](https://lullabytrust.org.uk) or  
call our free information  
line: **0808 802 6869**

At The Lullaby Trust, we exist to keep babies safe and keep grieving families supported.

If you found this information helpful and empowering, please consider donating today. You can place this same information in the hands of another parent or carer who needs it:  
[lullabytrust.org.uk/donate](https://lullabytrust.org.uk/donate)



**For every baby.  
For every family.  
Forever.**

## Other useful information

### Bliss

The leading UK charity for babies born premature or sick  
[www.bliss.org.uk](https://www.bliss.org.uk)  
Email: [hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)

### Twins Trust

The only UK-wide charity dedicated to improving the lives and wellbeing of families with twins, triplets or more.  
[www.twinstrust.org](https://www.twinstrust.org)  
Email: [enquiries@twinstrust.org](mailto:enquiries@twinstrust.org)

### Baby Sling Safety

The T.I.C.K.S. rule for safe babywearing, used with permission of the UK Sling Consortium  
[www.babyslingsafety.co.uk](https://www.babyslingsafety.co.uk)

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[lullabytrust.org.uk](https://lullabytrust.org.uk)  
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