

Safer Sleep for Babies Fact sheet 5

Mattresses, Bedding and Cots



Use a firm, flat, waterproof mattress in a good condition

Choosing a mattress can be one of the more confusing decisions to make for your baby. With so much on the market, it is helpful to remember a couple of key factors which have shown to lower the chance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The mattress you chose should be firm, flat and have a waterproof layer which can be wiped down and kept clean. This will prevent bacteria from collecting in the foam. You should also ensure that your baby's mattress is in good condition with no tears, holes or sagging.



You should sleep your baby on a firm, flat mattress that is clean and in a good condition. A mattress with a waterproof layer will help you keep it clean and dry

Keep your baby's sleep space plain and simple, with no heavy bedding (including duvets/quilts), pillows or toys. They can pose a risk both of your baby overheating, and the risk of accidentally obstructing your baby's breathing.

You should avoid using soft or bulky bedding (such as quilts, pillows and duvets) as these increase the chance of SIDS

It is important to ensure your baby's head is always kept uncovered by clothing or bedding. Babies lose heat from their heads. To help them keep the right body temperature their heads should be uncovered indoors where they may get hot and covered outdoors when it is cold. Loose bedding can risk your baby becoming too hot, or block your baby's nose and mouth.



The use of loose bedding which can cover your baby's face or head can be dangerous and can increase the chance of SIDS. To keep your baby safe and their head uncovered while they are sleeping you should:

- Place your baby on their back in the 'feet to foot' position (this is where the baby's feet are placed at the foot of the cot) so they can't wriggle down under the blankets
- Use blankets which are firmly tucked in, no higher than the baby's shoulders or sleeping bag

Research corner

Research has shown that overheating arising from high room temperatures, excessive insulation (overwrapping) or both, is associated with an increased risk of SIDS. A high proportion of infants who die as a result of SIDS are found with their head covered with bedding. Loose bedding which can cover a baby's face or head can be dangerous and has been shown to increase the chance of SIDS. Soft or bulky bedding, such as quilts, pillows and duvets, is also associated with an increased risk of SIDS in the UK. Pillow use alone has been shown to increase the risk of SIDS by 2½ times, compared with non-pillow use. In addition, the use of soft sleep surfaces has been found to be associated with a higher risk of SIDS and second-hand mattresses may also increase the risk.

Frequently asked questions



Our room is very small and we can only squeeze in a travel cot, is this safe?

The same 'safer sleep' rules apply to a travel cot, which should have a rigid frame and base, and a firm, flat mattress, covered in a waterproof material. Travel cot mattresses are often thinner and feel harder than those in a permanent cot, but don't be tempted to place folded blankets or a quilt under the baby to make them 'more comfortable'. If you are very tight for space, you may have to consider re-arranging the furniture in the room to ensure that the travel cot isn't against a radiator, in direct sunlight, and is out of reach of blind cords and hazards.

We have been given a cot and mattress second-hand. Is it safe to use with our new baby?

Generally we would advise it is safest to have a new mattress for each baby, though we know this is not always possible. There is some evidence to suggest that bringing in a mattress from another home might increase the risk of sudden infant death very slightly. When using your own mattress for a second (or more) time, ensure it is still firm and flat with no tears or holes, and is not sagging in places. Thoroughly clean the waterproof layer and ensure the mattress is clean and dry before making it up with fresh bed clothes.

Can I put my twin babies in the same cot to sleep?

The Lullaby Trust has no evidence that putting twins in the same cot, in the early months, places them at greater risk of sudden infant death. However, there are some things you can do to increase safety. Never put twins together in a Moses basket or a small cot as they may overheat in the restricted space. If you chose to sleep them side by side in one cot, only do this in the early weeks, when there is no danger of them rolling towards or over each other. It is also an option, right from the start, to place them at opposite ends of the cot, each of them 'feet to foot'. Each twin therefore has their own firmly tucked in bedclothes or baby sleeping bag. Do not use rolled towels, foam wedges, or other objects between their heads. By the time the twins are big enough to roll over they should be moved into their own separate cots. All the safe sleeping advice applicable to single babies should be followed whether the babies are in the cot together or not.

Is it okay for my baby to sleep in a car seat?

It is fine for your baby to fall asleep when they are in their car seat, but once you get home we would advise that you move your baby to their usual firm, flat surface to sleep. Our advice is that the safest place for your baby to sleep – both during the day for naps and during the night – is in a cot or Moses basket in a room with you for the first six months. It is important to check on your baby regularly when they are asleep. If your baby is being transported in a car, they should be carried in a properly designed and fitted car seat, facing backwards, and preferably be in sight of an adult. Be careful that your baby doesn't get too hot and remove hats and outdoor coats when you get in the car. On long car journeys, stop for breaks so your baby is not in the car seat for prolonged periods (some manufacturers recommend a maximum period of 2 hours in car seats). Premature babies who may slump need particular care when travelling in a car seat. Ask your car seat manufacturer if they have any safety advice about the specific model you are using.

Do you recommend baby hammocks?

The safest place for a baby to sleep is on a firm, flat surface, which is their own sleeping area.