



GLOBAL CHILDREN'S FUND

# THE DANGER OF SIDS

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SIDS is well known and talked about, but very little is understood about the condition. Even doctors and scientists disagree about what causes it, though some guidelines have been established. We hope this information helps shed some light on the subject:

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## What is SIDS?

SIDS stands for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It most commonly occurs between 2 and 4 months of age. (90% of deaths occur before 6 months, and it's rare under 6 months of age.) It is an unexplained death that occurs when the child is sleeping. It is generally recognized as a medical disorder, and is the leading cause of death in infants.

## What Causes SIDS?

The exact cause of SIDS is still a mystery, although most scientists believe it to be caused by a vulnerability in brain function or the nervous system, causing difficulties with heart rate and respiration during sleep. It is believed to be aggravated by external factors, such as sleeping a baby on their stomach. Many infant deaths are also likely a case of environmentally caused suffocation during sleep, but since the death is unexplained, it is classified as a SIDS death.

## Risk Factors for SIDS:

Researchers have documented some risk factors that increase the likelihood of SIDS.

- Mother smoking during pregnancy increases the risk by 3 times.
- Exposure to cigarette smoke in the home after birth. (Twice the risk)
- Being of African American heritage puts baby at 2 ½ times the risk.
- Being of Native American heritage (Three times the risk)
- Mother being less than 20 years old for her first pregnancy.
- Short interval between pregnancies
- Late or no prenatal care
- Low birth rate
- Multiple births

## Reducing the Risk of SIDS:

- 1 Always place babies on their backs to sleep, even at nap time.
- 2 Use proper sleep surfaces, such as approved crib mattress with a fitted sheet.
- 3 Keep soft objects out of the crib, such as blankets, pillows, quilts, crib bumpers, or stuffed animals.
- 4 Don't let your baby overheat during sleep. Dress them in light clothing, keep the room at 68 to 72 degrees, and don't bury them under blankets.
- 5 Avoid letting babies sleep on sofas or waterbeds as these can be a suffocation hazard.
- 6 It is believed that pacifiers reduce risk, though scientists are not quite sure why. Consider using one when sleeping, although you shouldn't force it on the child.

## Special Notes:

Once your child is old enough to roll over on their own, and rolls to their tummy when you place them on their back it is OK to allow them to sleep in their preferred position.

If your infant has chronic gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD) or other upper airway malformations, check with your doctor to ensure it is safe for them to sleep on their back.