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Simple Steps Can Lead To Safe Sleep For Infants

Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center
Published: October 15, 2014

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Most parents know that it's best for infants to sleep on their backs, rather than on their sides or bellies. But other caregivers may not -- especially if they raised their children in a time when there was less awareness about safe sleeping habits.

Leigh Brown, a health educator at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital's Pediatric Trauma Injury Prevention Program, said a baby's sleeping environment during the first year of life is one of the biggest factors in SIDS deaths.

"It's confusing for parents because in the media you see these cribs that look all cute and soft and comfortable, when all you really need is a mattress with a tight-fitting sheet," she said.

Items such as crib bumpers, extra bedding, stuffed animals and loose sheets and blankets can cause suffocation for infants who aren't yet able to roll or extract themselves from dangerous situations.

"People have the misconception that babies are freezing, but overheating them is a risk factor as well," Brown said. "If you are comfortable in your house, they probably are as well."

If you must use a blanket with an infant, she suggests tucking it in tightly along the sides and bottom of the crib and no higher than the infant's armpit so it doesn't get near the face.

Brown says parents shouldn't bother to spend their money on items such as sleep positioners, which claim to reduce the risk of SIDS or create a safe environment.

"Those items haven't proven to be safe," she said.

Nor do parents need to worry about the infant rolling from back to side or belly during sleep. If the child is able to roll, he or she is likely able to avoid suffocation.

Many SIDS deaths occur when parents practice bed sharing -- placing the baby between the parents in a regular bed. If parents want their baby to be nearby, it's best to practice room sharing instead by placing the baby in a separate crib or cradle near but not in the adult bed.

Mothers who tend to drift off to sleep while breastfeeding their babies run the risk of having their babies wedge into the crevice of their arm and suffocate.

Exposure to secondhand smoke on an adult's clothing or in the home environment can also increase the chances of a SIDS death.

For more information, check out the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Safe to Sleep public education campaign at www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/Pages/default.aspx or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at www.cdc.gov/sids.

This article was previously published by [Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center](#) in the October 15, 2014 [The Medical Minute](#).

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