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Safe Sleep for Your Baby:
What Every Parent Should Know

Bringing your baby home is exciting—but it can also feel overwhelming to make sure everything is safe. One of the most important things you can do to protect your newborn or infant is to create a **safe sleep environment** every time your baby sleeps, both day and night.

The Rules for Safe Sleep (and Why They Matter)

1. **Always place your baby on their back to sleep.**
   Why: Sleeping on the back greatly lowers the risk of *Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)*. Babies who sleep on their stomach or side are at much higher risk of breathing problems or rebreathing carbon dioxide. Once baby can roll over both ways on their own, it's okay to let them find their own sleep position.

2. **Use a firm, flat sleep surface.**
   Why: Soft mattresses, couches, recliners, or adult beds can trap a baby's face and make it hard to breathe. Use only a firm mattress with a tightly fitted sheet in a **safety-approved crib, bassinet, or Pack 'n Play**.

3. **Keep the sleep space clear—no pillows, blankets, bumpers, or stuffed animals.**
   Why: These items can accidentally cover your baby's nose or mouth, increasing the risk of suffocation or strangulation. Dress your baby in a wearable blanket or sleep sack instead of using loose bedding.

4. **Share a room, not a bed.**
   Why: The safest place for baby to sleep is in your room, in their own crib or bassinet, for at least the first 6 months. This helps you stay close for feeding or comforting while keeping them safe in their own space.

5. **Avoid sleep in car seats, swings, bouncers, or strollers (unless traveling).**
   Why: These seats are designed for sitting, not sleeping. A baby's head can fall forward in a way that blocks their airway. Always move baby to a flat sleep surface once you arrive home or can safely transfer them.

6. **Keep the room smoke-free and avoid overheating.**
   Why: Secondhand smoke and overheating both raise the risk of SIDS. Dress your baby in one more layer than you're comfortable in and keep the room at a comfortable temperature.

What Looks Safe (But Isn't)

Unsafe Sleep Environment	Why It's Unsafe
Car seat, swing, bouncer	Baby's head can fall forward, blocking airflow. Designed for supervised play only.
Adult bed or couch	Soft surfaces and pillows can lead to suffocation or falls.
Nursing pillow or lounger	Babies can roll into unsafe positions or slip down, covering their face.
Bed-sharing	Rolling over or loose bedding increases the risk of suffocation and SIDS. Room-sharing in a separate crib is safest.

1600 West 38th St · Suite 100 · Austin, TX 78731 (512) 458-5323 · Fax (512) 458-2030
Reference: healthychildren.org, AAP, cleavelandclinic.org

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Helping Your Baby Learn to Self-Soothe

Every parent wonders: *When will my baby fall asleep on their own?* The short answer — it takes time. Newborns (under 3 months) don't yet have the ability to calm themselves; they rely on you for comfort and security. As your baby grows, though, they begin to learn these skills gradually — with your gentle guidance. Think of it as **co-soothing**: you're still involved, but you're helping your baby do a little more of the calming each time.

How to Start: Most babies begin learning to self-soothe between **3 and 6 months of age**. Start by putting your baby down **drowsy but awake** so they can practice falling asleep without being fully rocked or fed to sleep. This helps them link their own bed and bedtime with comfort and rest.

Ways to Support Self-Soothing

- **Meet basic needs first.** Check that your baby isn't hungry, overtired, or uncomfortable. It's hard to relax when something's wrong!
- **Keep a consistent routine.** Regular nap and bedtime schedules help your baby's body recognize when it's time to sleep.
- **Try white noise or gentle sounds.** A steady background sound can calm babies and block sudden noises.
- **Offer comfort without picking up.** Talk softly, pat their chest, or rest your hand gently on them for reassurance before stepping away.
- **Use a pacifier if needed.** It's safe and can lower the risk of SIDS. Limit use to naps and bedtime so your baby doesn't depend on it all day.
- **Wean from feeding to sleep.** If your baby tends to fall asleep while eating, gently stop the feed when they're drowsy but not asleep, then lay them down to finish drifting off.

Self-soothing takes patience and practice — for both you and your baby. With consistency, most babies learn to fall asleep (and fall back asleep) on their own within a few months. You can do this, and we are here to support you!

Trusted Resources & Great Reads for Parents

Websites:

- HealthyChildren.org: Safe Sleep Tips
- AAP Policy on Safe Sleep
- CDC: Safe Sleep Environments
- How to swaddle your baby

Books:

- *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5* (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- *The Happiest Baby on the Block* by Dr. Harvey Karp
- *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child* by Dr. Marc Weissbluth

Remember

- Safe sleep is simple—but it saves lives.
- Your baby should always sleep **on the back, in their own space, on a firm surface, with nothing else in the sleep area.**
- By following these rules every time, you're giving your baby the safest start possible.
- You are an incredible parent, and your baby is already so fortunate because of YOU!

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