Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexplained death of an infant under 1 year of age. It is blamed for the death of nearly 4,500 babies a year in the United States, or .49 deaths per 1,000 live births. SIDS is sometimes called crib death, although it is important to know that cribs do not cause SIDS.

The exact cause of SIDS is not known. But many factors that put babies at higher risk are known. SIDS usually occurs when babies are between 1 and 4 months of age. It affects boys more than girls. African American and American Indian babies are at greater risk of SIDS. And most SIDS deaths occur during the colder months of the year—fall, winter, and early spring. Experts say the higher number of SIDS deaths in colder months may be due to babies being overly bundled or overheated when they sleep.

The rate of SIDS deaths is declining. The rate of SIDS deaths among American babies has fallen by more than 60 percent since 1993, largely because doctors know more about which precautions to take and parents are taking their advice.

The fact that these precautions seem to help reduce SIDS deaths is good news. And more is being learned about SIDS every year. Based on new information, for example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recently updated the steps it recommends you take to help keep your baby safe while sleeping.
Tips for preventing SIDS
Understanding what is known about SIDS and factors that put babies at greater risk of SIDS, and taking simple recommended precautions will help you keep your baby safer.

Conditions that may contribute to SIDS
Studies suggest certain conditions may contribute to SIDS deaths. These include:

- Blocked breathing.
- Too much carbon dioxide (if a baby’s head is covered with a sheet or blanket).
- Infections.
- Abnormalities in the part of the brain that controls breathing and waking.
- Abnormal sleep patterns, possibly due to an underdeveloped nervous system.

Risk factors for SIDS

- Exposing a baby to secondhand cigarette smoke.
- Having a mother who smoked during her pregnancy. This is believed to be a leading factor in SIDS deaths.
- Letting babies sleep on their stomach or side.
- Sleeping on soft pillows or mattresses.
- Being African American or American Indian. SIDS-related deaths are two to three times higher among these children.
- Being born prematurely at a low birth weight.
- Having a mother who did not get prenatal care or started it late.
- Having parents or other caregivers who are unaware of SIDS.
- Sharing a bed with a baby or putting the baby to sleep on a sofa.

Steps you should take to reduce the risk of SIDS
The American Academy of Pediatricians recommends the following steps for reducing the risk of SIDS:

- Put your babies on their back to sleep, for naps and at night.
- Use a firm sleep surface. Put your baby to sleep on a firm crib mattress, covered by a sheet.
- Keep soft objects and loose bedding out of the crib.
- Pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, stuffed toys, and other soft objects should be kept out of an infant’s sleeping area.
- Don’t expose your baby to secondhand cigarette smoke. Don’t smoke around your baby, and don’t allow others to smoke around your baby.
- Have your baby sleep in a separate area, such as a crib in your room. Bed sharing during sleep is not recommended.
- You might give your baby a pacifier at nap time and bedtime. The pacifier should be used when you put your baby down to sleep and should not be reinserted once the baby falls asleep.
Avoid overheating. Your baby should be lightly clothed for sleep. The bedroom temperature should be kept comfortable for a lightly clothed adult.

Avoid commercial products marketed to reduce the risk of SIDS. None have been tested well enough to prove they are safe and effective.

Do not use home monitors as a strategy to reduce the risk of SIDS. There is no evidence that home monitors lower the risk of SIDS.

Lower the risk of flat spots developing on your baby’s head. Do this by providing “tummy time” when your baby is awake, changing the direction your baby lies in the crib, and avoiding too much time in car seats, carriers, and bouncers.

Make sure that others who care for your baby follow these recommendations. That includes friends, relatives, child care workers, and babysitters.

**Check with your pediatrician if your child has certain health conditions**

It might not be a good idea for some babies to sleep on their back. If your baby often spits up after eating or has certain health conditions such as breathing, lung, or heart problems, ask your doctor if it is OK to put your baby to sleep on his or her back.

**Remember, SIDS deaths are rare**

The threat of SIDS can be frightening. But SIDS deaths are rare, and the number is falling. Take the simple precautions listed above, and relax and enjoy your baby.