How to keep your baby safe and healthy
Babies who sleep on their backs are safer and healthier. It is not safe for babies to sleep on their fronts or sides. Babies settle more easily on their backs if they have been placed to sleep that way from the very first day.

If your baby is less than six months old and you find him asleep on his tummy, gently turn him onto his back. Don’t feel you need to keep getting up all night to check on this. After this age, babies can usually roll onto their backs themselves so leave him to find his own position. Whatever your baby’s age always place them to sleep on the back.

Premature babies are slept on the front in hospital for special medical reasons. If your baby was born prematurely then make sure you keep her safe by sleeping her on the back when you take her home from hospital unless your doctor advises a different sleep position.

It can be dangerous if your baby’s head gets covered when she sleeps. Place her with her feet to the foot of the cot, with the bedclothes firmly tucked in and no higher than her shoulders, so she can’t wriggle down under the covers. Don’t worry if she wriggles up and gets uncovered. You can also use a baby sleeping bag.
The safest place for your baby to sleep for the first six months is in a crib or cot in a room with you.

It's especially dangerous for your baby to sleep in your bed if you (or your partner):

- are a smoker (even if you never smoke in bed or at home)
- have been drinking alcohol
- take medication or drugs that make you drowsy
- feel very tired; or if your baby:
- was premature (born before 37 weeks)
- was low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5½lb)
- is less than 4 months old.

Sadly, accidents can happen:

- you might roll over in your sleep and suffocate your baby
- your baby could get caught between the wall and the bed
- your baby could roll out of your bed and be injured.

It's very dangerous to sleep together with a baby on a sofa, armchair or settee and it is also risky to sleep a baby alone in an adult bed.
Breastfeed your baby and it will help keep him safe.

It’s the natural and best way to feed him and it increases his resistance to infection.

Using a dummy every time you settle your baby to sleep – day and night – can reduce the risk of cot death.

If breastfeeding, do not give a dummy until breastfeeding is well-established. Premature or sick babies in hospital may be given a dummy before breastfeeding is started and parents should follow doctors’ advice.

Don’t worry if the dummy falls out while your baby is asleep, and don’t force her to take a dummy if she doesn’t want it. Never coat the dummy in anything sweet.

Gradually wean her off a dummy after six months and before one year.
Babies don’t need hot rooms.

Babies don’t need especially warm rooms. All-night heating is rarely necessary. Babies should never sleep next to a radiator or in direct sunlight.

To keep an eye on the temperature buy a simple room thermometer, available for £2.75. Please call 020 7802 3200 or go to www.fsid.org.uk to order.

Check your baby regularly to make sure he isn’t too hot – or too cold.

In warm summer weather I may not need any bedclothes at all.

To check if your baby is too hot, look for sweating or feel your baby – don’t worry if his hands or feet are cool; that’s normal. If he’s too hot, remove one or more layers of blankets. Babies who are unwell need fewer – not more – bedclothes.
If your baby is under a year old:

- don’t use a duvet, quilt or pillow
- don’t use electric blankets or hot water bottles
- use one or more layers of light blankets or use a baby sleeping bag.

There has been one study showing an increased risk of cot death for swaddled babies. More research is needed but parents should be cautious. If you decide to swaddle your baby, don’t cover her head and only use thin materials. If you use a sheepskin, take it away as soon as your baby starts trying to roll on to her tummy.

If you use a baby sleeping bag, it needs to be without a hood, very lightweight and the right size around the neck so your baby won’t slip down inside the bag. Never use with a duvet.
It is very important that your baby’s mattress is kept clean and dry. Ideally you should buy a new mattress for each new baby. If you are not able to do this, use the one you have as long as it was made with a completely waterproof cover and has no tears, cracks or holes. Clean it thoroughly and dry it.

Check that the mattress:
• is in good condition
• is flat and firm, not soft
• fits the cot without any gaps
• doesn’t sag.

‘Ventilated’ mattresses (with holes) are not recommended as it is not possible to keep the inside clean.

Never sleep your baby on a pillow, cushion, beanbag, or waterbed. Never sleep together with your baby on a sofa. Make sure the cot is in good condition particularly if it’s second hand or old. Check the gaps between the bars are less than 6.5cm, and the space between the mattress and cot is no more than 3cm. If you use a Moses basket, it should have only a thin lining.
Some babies cry more than others. If crying continues, check that it is not due to the usual things – hunger, thirst, wet nappy, being too hot or too cold – and then if rocking or cuddling doesn’t settle your baby, talk to your health visitor or doctor. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from friends, family or your health visitor if it all gets too much.

Never shake your baby or put anything over his mouth.
Babies are healthier if they are kept smoke-free. Cut smoking in pregnancy – dad too. The only way to keep babies smoke free is never to smoke in the home. Your baby is still at risk if you open windows, smoke in a different room, or use a fan, vaporiser or ioniser. Ask visitors to smoke outside. Don’t take your baby into smoky places. If your friends or relatives object, show them this booklet!

Don’t let anyone smoke in your home.

Take care of your baby’s health.

Have your baby immunised and go for checkups. Babies often have minor illnesses. If your baby is unwell, make sure he is not too hot and drinks plenty of fluids – wake him for regular drinks if necessary.

Take me for regular check ups

Don’t let people with colds get too near your baby and if you are unwell wash your hands before you pick him up. If you are worried, don’t hesitate to get in touch with your health visitor or doctor (see the back cover for a list of signs of serious illness).
Breastfeed your baby. It’s the natural and best way to feed her and increases her resistance to infection.

Wash your hands before feeding your baby and, if you are bottle-feeding your baby, make sure the bottle and teats are properly sterilised. Always test the heat of food or drink before giving it to your baby to make sure it’s not too hot. Don’t heat your baby’s food or milk in a microwave.

When feeding from a spoon, either sit your baby up on your lap or put her in a highchair with a harness if she is big enough. Place highchairs out of reach of objects on the table or kitchen counter which she could pull over and hurt herself with. Make sure your baby can’t reach hot drinks or pan handles that she could pull down. Don’t hold a baby when you’ve got a hot drink in your hand.
Smoke alarms save lives.

If a fire breaks out an extra few seconds can make a real difference. It’s best to have at least two smoke alarms.

Plan the way you would escape a fire with your baby.

Don’t let children play with matches or lighters.

Contact your local fire brigade for information on fire prevention.

Keep your baby away from fires and heaters, hot water pipes and radiators. Use fireguards.

Keep the water thermostat on a low setting. Keep the iron out of your baby’s reach, including when it is cooling down.
Always use a properly fitted baby car seat that is the right size for your baby. Never put your baby in the front of a car with passenger air bags. Do not use a second hand car seat as you cannot be sure it was not damaged in an accident with the previous owner. Do not let your baby sleep in his car seat in your home.

Never leave your baby alone in a car. Make sure your baby isn’t in direct sunlight and doesn’t get too hot. Don’t smoke in the car.

Use a harness for your baby in push chairs and baby buggies. Don’t put shopping bags on the handles.

Even a few centimetres of water are dangerous to babies so make sure your baby can’t roll or crawl to any ponds, puddles, buckets or garden pots that fill with rainwater. Constantly supervise small children near water.

In cold weather remove hats and extra layers of clothing from your baby when you come in from outdoors, or go into warm places such as a car, bus, train or shop.
Babies should have plenty of opportunity to play on their front, so their muscles develop properly and to avoid misshapen heads. Keep an eye on them at all times.

It’s lovely to have your baby in bed with you for a cuddle or a feed, or to play. But put her back in her own cot before you go to sleep.

Only let your baby play with toys intended for their age. Even a bright baby can get into difficulties with the wrong type of toy. Make sure that heavy objects are on a solid surface and can’t be pulled over. Keep small objects like buttons, peanuts and pills out of your baby’s reach in case she chokes on them.

Keep your baby’s seat or bouncer on the floor so your baby can’t bounce her way off a high surface.

It’s best to change your baby’s nappy on the floor. If you use a raised surface, get everything ready from the start and don’t leave your baby for a moment.

I want to play on my tummy

I need cuddling and lots of attention
As soon as your baby can crawl, use stair gates at the top and bottom of staircases.

Do not use a baby walker as they lead to accidents.

Make sure your baby cannot reach cords on curtains or window blinds. Don’t let your baby get into contact with any type of ribbons or string which could strangle him. Don’t tie a dummy around your baby’s neck.

Move furniture such as beds, sofas and chairs away from windows to prevent babies from climbing up and falling out.
Never leave your baby alone in a bath – not even for a second. Don’t leave an older child to look after her. If the phone rings, ignore it or take your baby with you to answer it.

If you use a bath seat or support you still need to be with your baby at all times.

Avoid burns and scalds by:

- keeping the hot water thermostat turned down
- running cold water first into the bath
- using a bath thermometer or testing the water temperature with your arm.
Contact your doctor if your baby:

- has a high-pitched or weak cry, is less responsive, is much less active or more floppy than usual
- looks very pale all over, grunts with each breath, is working very hard to breathe when you look at the chest and tummy
- takes less than a third of usual fluids, passes much less urine than usual, vomits green fluid, or passes blood in their poo
- has a high fever with sweating.

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance if your baby:

- stops breathing or goes blue
- is unresponsive and shows no awareness of what is going on
- has glazed eyes and does not focus on anything
- cannot be woken
- has a fit. Even if your baby recovers on their own, still contact your doctor
- has been badly or seriously injured
- has a rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass.

For more information and advice:

- call FSID’s Freephone Helpline on 0808 802 68 68 or visit the website at www.fsid.org.uk
- talk to your health visitor or doctor
- call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or visit www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- contact your health visitor for local first aid and resuscitation training.

BabyZone is a campaign of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, the UK’s leading baby charity aiming to prevent sudden deaths and promote health.

In this booklet we refer to “him” and “her” but the advice is for all babies.