

Safer Swaddling

Although swaddling has been practiced for years, recent studies show that swaddling for sleep can put your baby at risk of suffocation. If you have tried calming your baby and nothing has worked, you can try swaddling to settle your crying baby.



What are the risks of swaddling?

Swaddling can get in the way of mother- baby bonding and newborn feeding

Skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby has many benefits. It helps you develop your relationship with your baby, helps reduce your baby's stress, promotes more restful sleep and helps with breastfeeding.

Tight swaddling can be risky

- Tight swaddling can interfere with breathing and can even lead to pneumonia. Your baby must have enough room for his or her chest to move.
- It can cause long-term hip problems. Your baby must have enough room to freely move the hips and legs.

Swaddling for sleep may result in sudden infant death

- Loose fabric can cover baby's face and cause suffocation.
- If the baby becomes unwrapped, the fabric can become wrapped around baby's neck and cause strangulation.
- The baby may roll onto his or her stomach and be unable to roll back .
- Babies wrapped in blankets or heavy fabrics can get too hot, which increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Sleeping with a baby on a bed or couch greatly increases the risk of sudden infant death and suffocation. This risk is even higher when a baby is swaddled.



When to stop swaddling baby

When baby can roll or is able to unravel the wrap, it is time to stop swaddling because the loose fabric creates a suffocation or strangulation risk. If your baby likes the “tucked in” feeling:

- Lay baby on back with feet near the bottom of the crib.
- Place blanket so that it is no higher than baby’s armpits.
- Tuck the blanket into the sides and bottom of the crib.

Choose a wrap that is:

- Free of drawstrings, ribbons, cords or tight elastic.
- Free of buttons, snaps or decorations which could become loose and cause choking.
- Made of breathable fabric such as light cotton with a loose weave. Do not use a heavy blanket for swaddling.

Choose the right swaddling technique for your baby’s age

- For younger babies (about 0-3 months old) wrap the arms in the swaddle with baby’s elbows bent, and hands close to the chin.
- For older babies (about 3-6 months old and babies who can roll) leave their arms free.

What are the reasons for swaddling?

- If you’ve tried to soothe your crying baby by feeding, changing, and cuddling and your baby still isn’t comforted, you might try swaddling to calm him or her.
- Healthcare providers may recommend swaddling during bottle feeding for babies who are born prematurely, who become upset or distracted when feeding, who have a very low birth weight, or who have trouble gaining weight.
- Swaddling can provide pain relief for infants. Your doctor or nurse might swaddle your baby for needles or other painful procedures.

How to safely swaddle baby

Dress your baby in a light sleeper or undershirt to prevent overheating.

1. Spread the wrap out flat with one corner folded down.

Lay baby face-up with baby's head and neck above the folded corner.

2. Bring baby's hands together over the chest. Bring one side of the wrap over top of the arms and tuck it beneath the baby.
3. Fold the bottom of the wrap up, leaving room for your baby's feet to move freely. The hips and knees should be a little bent and have room to move.
4. Bring the second side of the wrap across the baby, tucking the end behind baby.

Check that the swaddle is not tight: 2 fingers should fit between the wrap and your baby's chest.

If your baby is sweating, he or she is too warm. You need to remove the swaddle.

Your baby is now ready to be held for comfort or feeding. Swaddled babies must never be placed on their sides or stomachs, even for a minute.



Choosing safer sleep sacks

Many types of products are available to help your baby sleep and keep your baby warm. Some products are sold as:

- sleep sacks
- swaddling sacks
- swaddle blankets
- wearable blankets
- or baby sleeping bags.



Not all products are safe choices for your baby. Some designs can put your baby at risk of choking, suffocating or overheating.

If you choose to use sleep sacks or other sleeping products, look for ones that:

- do not have drawstrings, ribbons, cords or tight elastic;
- do not have buttons, snaps or decorations which could become loose and cause choking;
- do not have a hood, collar, or wrap near the face that could cover baby's mouth and nose;
- meet children's sleepwear flammability guidelines (Check the label).
- are made from lightweight fabric; and
- fit properly.

The product should:

- be snug around the upper body so that baby is unable to wiggle out of the sack;
- not be tight around baby's chest. You should be able to get two fingers between baby's chest and the sack; and
- be loose around the hips. Your baby's legs and hips should bend and move comfortably.

Always follow the manufacturer's age, weight and length recommendations, and safety precautions.

Choose a safe sleep place

- From birth to six months of age, the safest place for baby to sleep is a crib, playpen or bassinet in the same room as the parents.
- The room should be smoke-free.
- The crib should meet Health Canada's safety standards.
- Only use a fitted bottom sheet – no other blankets, bumper pads, pillows or toys.
- The crib rails are raised to their highest position.
- Baby should be placed on his or her back to sleep.