

Is swaddling safe?

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As a labor and delivery nurse, I know nothing calms a fussy baby faster than a nice, cozy swaddle. But lately, there has been some backlash against swaddling and some childcare centers have even banned it. So, what's wrong with swaddling?



When I think new baby, I think one thing — a baby wrapped up like a burrito. I have swaddled every one of my babies. In fact, I am still swaddling my 10-month-old! However, everyone isn't as fond of swaddling as I am.

A daycare center in Minnesota banned the practice of swaddling babies sleeping in cribs after recommendations from the National Resource Center on Child Health and Safety that showed a possible link to an increased risk of SIDS with swaddling.

The official recommendations state, “in child care settings, swaddling is not necessary or recommended” as “there is evidence that swaddling can increase the risk of serious health outcomes, especially in certain situations.”

So what's wrong with swaddling?

According to the guidelines, the Center believes that swaddling can increase the risk of SIDS if infants are placed on their stomachs to sleep, if the swaddle is too loose, posing a risk of blankets on the baby's face, or if it induces overheating. And although all of those things are true, they are also true of unswaddled babies.

The guidelines go on to say, “even with newborns, research does not provide conclusive data about whether swaddling should or should not be used. Benefits of swaddling may include decreased crying, increased sleep periods and improved temperature control.” Again, with three happily swaddled babies, I will attest to all three of those. The center concludes, “If swaddling is used, it should be used less and less over the course of the first few weeks and months of an infant’s life.”

SIDS and swaddling

The recommendations came in response to [studies like this one from South England](#), that found almost a quarter of SIDS babies studied were swaddled. Unfortunately, the study found that the swaddled babies were also recipients of other unsafe sleep practices — like stomach sleeping, co-sleeping or using a pillow in the crib. So although many people were quick to latch on to the swaddling aspect of the study, it is more than likely that the babies who died of SIDS did so because of the combination of other unsafe practices.

Doing it right

While the recommendations may make sense for child care centers, where care providers may be overworked or infants not monitored as closely during nap times, there is no reason to fear the swaddle — practiced correctly — in a home environment.

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that they support “safe swaddling of infants that leaves the hips and legs free to move.” To improve the safety of swaddling, it is also recommended that parents take a baby care class to learn the proper technique for swaddling or use a commercial baby sleep sack to avoid blankets loosening. [Using a fan in the bedroom](#) can also prevent the infant from overheating and help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Bottom line? Swaddling is safe in the right conditions — and sometimes a lifesaver for fussy babies and parents — so brush up on your safe sleeping practices if swaddling is right for your baby.