

Are Weighted Blankets Safe for Babies?

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Weighted blankets are becoming a popular trend, especially among parents. Pinterest, an inspiration website, reported a 259 percent increase in saved pins for weighted blankets in the year 2017, predicting that the trend will become even more popular.

What Are Weighted Blankets?

Weighted blankets are just what they sound like: blankets that have extra weight built into them. There are different types of materials used to add the extra weight; for example, some blankets use chain links built right into the interior of the blanket and have padding for comfort.

Others use small weighted pellets or metal balls to add weight. There are also different weights available, such as 6 kilograms or 10 kilograms of excess weight.

The extra weight is purported to induce a calming effect on the person who is using the blanket without adding additional warmth. For example, one study found that using a blanket that was at least 10 percent of the individual's body weight produces calming, beneficial benefits and helped improve sleep in individuals with insomnia.

Weighted blankets were first introduced to help calm individuals with autism spectrum disorders, hyperactivity disorders, and certain developmental disorders. Essentially, the weighted blankets produce a deep pressure on the body, which helps induce feelings of calmness, reduces anxiety, and promotes relaxation and sleep. Weighted blankets have been found to help with all of these things in both individuals with certain disorders and the elderly.

For example, some nursing homes have begun introducing weighted blankets to help their residents sleep better at night and reduce agitation and restlessness.

Because weighted blankets have been found to help induce better sleep, parents may wonder if a weighted blanket could help their infant sleep better.

Most parents struggle with getting a good night's sleep and any tool that promises better sleep sounds promising.

Weighted blankets, however, pose a significant risk to babies, toddlers, and even older children, especially if they have any developmental disorders or delays. There have been at least two reports of deaths due to weighted blankets, one in a nine-month-old baby and one in a nine-year-old boy who had autism.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) also completed their own study to assess if weighted blankets could help improve sleep in children with autism, but they found that weighted blankets were not effective in helping children with autism fall asleep faster, sleep longer, or wake up at night any less frequently. So, not only are weighted blankets unsafe for children, but there is no proof that they work to help improve sleep either.

Currently, the AAP's safe sleep guidelines recommend that parents and caregivers do not use blankets of any kind around babies, and especially while they are sleeping or napping. The AAP recommends the use of approved sleep sacks instead of blankets to reduce the risk of SIDS.

A Word From Verywell

While it may be tempting to try just about anything to help your baby or toddler sleep better at night, there isn't enough evidence yet to support the use of weighted blankets in infants and young children.

The AAP's safe sleep recommendations include restricting the use of any type of blanket in babies, as a blanket can pose a risk of strangulation and could increase the risk of SIDS.

A weighted blanket in particular could be especially risky to a baby or toddler, as the excess weight could cause the baby to get trapped underneath the blanket and be unable to move. And if the blanket made its way to the baby's face, it could pose a suffocation risk as well. It's also worth noting that even if you aren't using a weighted blanket with your baby or toddler, if you nap or sleep with your baby at all and you have a weighted blanket in your own bed, it is still a hazard.

Parents should avoid the use of weighted blankets around babies and toddlers and follow safe sleep recommendations by the AAP to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related injuries and deaths.

So, for now, skip the weighted blankets around babies and instead, consider stocking up on coffee for the morning after those sleepless nights. (For yourself, of course, not the baby.)

Sources

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