

Keeping Your Baby Safe From Birth to Six Months

Did you know that accidents are the number one cause of death and permanent disability in infants and children in the United States? Every month nearly 300 children under 4 years old die as a result of accidents. Many others are seriously injured but survive with permanent handicaps.

Most accidents could be prevented. They happen because parents don't know what their children can do to get hurt and don't take the necessary steps to protect them. Don't let your child become a statistic. Follow these suggestions to keep your baby safe.

Choose a Safe Crib: New cribs must meet national standards for safety, but old and poorly maintained cribs can be dangerous places for babies. Things to look for:

- The vertical slats should be no more than 2-3/8 inches apart. Why? So the baby's head won't slip through and get trapped.
- The end panels should be solid, without any cutouts. Why? Again so the baby's head won't get trapped.
- The corner posts should either be flush with the end panels or very tall, like the posts on a canopy bed. Why? So clothing can't get caught over a post, choking the child.
- The sides of the crib should be at least 9 inches above the mattress when lowered and 26 inches above the mattress when raised. Why? So the child won't fall out of the crib.
- The latches on the side should lock securely in such a way that they won't release accidentally and let the side drop.
- The mattress should fit snugly within the sides of the crib. Why? So the baby's head, arms or legs won't get stuck in a gap.

Don't place the crib near any hanging cords from curtains or blinds. Why? They can strangle a child. Don't put large stuffed animals or plastic sheeting in the crib. Why? They might fall on the baby's face and suffocate him or her. And remember: **Always put your baby down to sleep on his or her back to minimize the risk of Crib Death.**

Use an Automobile Safety Seat: Do not carry your baby in your arms or on your lap in the car. It's not safe. Your infant should ride in an age-appropriate safety seat every time you go for a drive, no matter how short. There are many different good safety seats. Shop around and pick one that you will use consistently. Be sure it will fit in your car, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Things to consider:

- Infants should always ride in infant seats that face backward in the car until they are one year old and weigh at least 20 pounds.
- Never put an infant seat in the front passenger seat of a car with a passenger-side air bag. The air bag could kill the child.
- The safest place for an infant seat is in the center of the car's back seat.

Keeping infants in car seats is not only a good idea; Florida law requires it.

Avoiding Falls: You'll be surprised how much your baby can move around by wiggling and squirming, and you never can tell when he or she will learn to roll over. Never leave your baby on anything - bed, couch, changing table - from which he or she could fall. If you are visiting friends where there is no crib or play pen, put the baby on a blanket on the floor. He or she can't fall off the floor!

Avoiding Burns: Your baby will soon start waving his or her hands around and grabbing at things. Don't drink hot coffee or tea while holding your baby. He or she might spill it and get burned. Of course, you would never think of smoking while holding your baby. Not only would that put the baby at risk of being burned, but babies exposed to cigarette smoke are likely to be sick twice as much in the first year of life as babies who aren't.