

Pediatrician offers advice on how to safely help a baby with a stuffy nose sleep

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Every year in the U.S., some 3,400 babies die while sleeping. Many lose their lives to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which has no clear cause. Others manage to twist or turn themselves into a position that narrows

their airways. Some babies suffocate when pillows or blankets block their mouths or noses.

Based on what research shows are the safest sleep practices, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that [babies](#) always sleep flat on their backs on an even, firm surface. Their sleep space also should be free of pillows, props, pads, blankets, stuffed animals or other soft materials.

Avoid propping up congested babies so they sleep elevated. This is not a safe practice. Think of your baby's airway as a straw. Your baby breathes easiest when the "straw" is straight. When your baby's head is propped up or on an incline, it's easy for their neck to bend forward or fall to the side. That can cause a bend in the airway that makes it harder for the baby to breathe—even if you're using a device that seems made for the job.

In fact, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has banned the sale and manufacture of inclined sleepers (any product in which the baby's head is more than 10 degrees above a flat surface). This was after a series of infant deaths showed how dangerous they can be.

It can also be tempting to place a fussy baby in a soothing device like a swing. But keep in mind that your little one is already struggling to breathe. When babies fall asleep in swings, rockers or bouncy chairs, they can't keep their head upright and their airway straight. So don't let your little one sleep in them.

Car seats and baby carriers are made to hold your baby's head upright or at a slight angle, but they don't provide enough support for safe sleep. If your little one drifts off in the car, resist the urge to carry them inside in their car seat and let them continue napping. Always move them to a dedicated sleep space as soon as you can.

The best place for your baby to sleep is in a bassinet, bedside sleeper, portable crib or play yard (pack-and-play) or other portable sleeper that meets CPSC guidelines. Just make sure it's outfitted with a firm, flat mattress with no soft furnishings.

Stuffy noses happen when the blood vessels and tissues inside your baby's nose fill up with too much fluid. Here are some safe ways to relieve congestion while your baby recovers from a cold, the flu, or any other virus that causes congestion:

A stuffy nose can cause babies to feed more slowly or not feel like eating. Try to suction your baby's nose before nursing or bottle-feeding them. If it is difficult for your baby to feed at the breast because of the congestion, expressing breastmilk into a cup or bottle may be an option. In addition, if your baby is at least 6 months old, you can offer them a little bit of water (4-8 oz/day, 0.5-1 cup/day) in an open, sippy or strawed cup.

Call 911 if your baby is struggling to breathe, can barely make sounds or cry, has bluish lips or face or appears to have something caught in their throat.

Call your baby's doctor if their breathing is much faster than normal, their lips or face turn bluish when they cough or they have nonstop coughing that is keeping them from sleeping, eating or playing.

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