

American SIDS Institute

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But my baby doesn't like sleeping on his back. Can't I let him sleep on his tummy?

response by

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Answer:

It's hard to know for sure what babies like since they can't tell us. However, babies do tend to cry more when placed on their backs. In fact, for many "hard to soothe" infants, placing them on their stomachs does seem to calm them and help them fall to sleep. Also, babies wake less when on their stomachs and it takes more stimulation to wake them than when they are on their backs. Another thing we know is that tummy-sleeping infants retain more heat than when on their backs.

But should parents give in and place their little ones on their tummies? They should certainly not! Infants are more likely to have apnea (pauses in breathing) when on their stomachs. They are also more likely to re-breathe the air they have just exhaled, which can raise their levels of carbon dioxide. The increased retention of body heat can also be dangerous for some infants. But more convincing than any other fact is that belly-sleep has up to 12.9 times the risk of death as back-sleep*.

	Stomach-sleep	Back-sleep
Cries more		X
Wakes more		X
Harder to arouse	X	
More likely to over-heat	X	
Re-breaths more	X	
Increases carbon dioxide	X	
Has more apnea	X	
Spits up more	same	same
More likely to choke	same	same
Greater risk of SIDS death	X	

* Changing concepts of sudden infant death syndrome: implications for infant sleeping environment and sleep position. American Academy of Pediatrics. Task Force on Infant Sleep Position and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. *Pediatrics* 2000 Mar;105(3 Pt 1):650-656