

## Baby care - safety issues

Providing a safe environment is an important part of caring for your new baby. Babies need to be safe at home and when they're away from home. There are some simple things you can do to help keep your baby safe and secure. Always consult your healthcare professional if you have concerns about your baby.

### Keep your baby safe

Make your baby's safety a priority. Some of the key areas you must keep in mind are:

- Take your baby home from hospital in a capsule or other approved child restraint for newborns that faces the back of the car.
- Ensure your baby travels in a child restraint at all times.
- Provide a safe sleeping environment for your baby – this includes taking precautions to reduce the risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI), which includes SIDS and fatal sleep accidents..
- Provide a safe environment at home.
- Check for a safe environment when you are away from home.

### Car safety

Children learn from watching others. They copy what they see adults doing in the car. Make sure you act safely and do the right thing when you are with young children.

Children under one year of age must be restrained when in the car. The law states that children seven years old or younger must be carried in an approved restraint. The restraint must be:

- Approved by VicRoads (check that it carries an Australian Standards AS 1754 sticker)
- Suitable for the child's age, size and weight. Children need different restraints as their bodies grow. The restraint that you use must match the size and weight of your child's body. As children of the same age can differ in weight and size, age is only a rough guide to the correct restraint
- Adjusted to fit your child's body correctly
- Properly fitted to the vehicle. Follow the manufacturer's instructions. Your local RACV/VicRoads Restraint Fitting Station can advise you on the correct fitting of the restraint.

Other safety issues to keep in mind include:

- Your baby should travel in the back seat of the car. In fact, it is safer for children of any age to travel in the back seat. By law, the driver is responsible for ensuring that all passengers under the age of 16 are restrained correctly.
- Never leave your baby unattended in the car – not even for a short time. It is illegal.
- Even in cooler weather, the temperature in a car can reach dangerously high levels in a short period of time. Babies and children may overheat. On a hot day, your baby may just need a light singlet or nightdress. Avoid long car trips in hot weather.
- Use the restraint for every journey, no matter how short. Most crashes occur close to home.
- Develop good car safety habits. Always put your baby in and out of the car on the kerb side, away from traffic.

### Provide a safe environment at home

Newborn babies have very little protection against infection, so it is important that you provide a clean, hygienic environment. One of the most important things you can do is to make sure that anyone who handles your baby, including you, has washed their hands beforehand.

People who have infections, for example, colds, flu or cold sores (herpes simplex), should not come in contact with your baby. Cold sores can be particularly dangerous to a newborn baby. Vaccinations are available to protect your baby against some infectious diseases. Your maternal and child health nurse will advise you.

## General safety tips at home

Injuries often happen unexpectedly because adults are unaware of what babies can do and how quickly they develop new skills. Understanding a child's development will assist in planning ahead for safety. Different risks emerge at each new stage of development and change takes place very rapidly in the early months and years.

Make sure your baby is safe at all times. You should:

- Supervise young children whenever they are near the baby.
- Keep animals away from the baby. The change in the household when there is a new baby may upset some pets.
- To avoid serious scald burns, do not drink hot drinks when nursing your baby.
- When you change your baby, make sure you put them down in a safe place; for example, a change table with raised edges to prevent the baby rolling off. Remember to keep one hand on the baby at all times. Never leave your baby alone on the change table. To prevent falls, some parents choose to change the baby on the floor.

## Make bath time a safe time

When you give your baby (or child) a bath:

- Always supervise your child in the bath. The carer should be within arm's reach of the child at all times.
- Do not use a baby support to prop the baby up in the bath.
- Never leave an older child to supervise a younger child in the bath.
- If your telephone or doorbell rings, take your child with you.
- Empty the bath immediately after use.
- To avoid the risk of drowning, always keep the doors to the bathroom and laundry securely closed.

## Provide a safe sleeping environment

Many parents worry about sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI), which includes sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleep accidents. Research has shown that there are some simple things you can do to reduce the risks:

- Put your baby to sleep on their back.
- Do not have fluffy toys, 'bumpers' or doona covers in the cot or bassinette as they can cause babies to overheat or can smother a baby.
- Make up the bottom of the cot with blankets and sheets, like you would a normal bed. Place your baby with their feet at the bottom of the cot.
- Keep your baby's head uncovered while they sleep.
- Do not let anyone smoke in the house, in the car or around your baby.

## Keep your baby safe when you're out

Make sure you use a baby stroller or pram correctly:

- Don't hang shopping bags from the handles as it may cause the stroller to tip over.
- Make sure you read the manufacturer's instructions and use the safety features.
- Always put the harness on your baby (even for short trips) to avoid fall injuries.

Remember to protect your baby from the sun and wind. A simple cloth thrown over the stroller may be enough, but make sure it's very light to avoid trapping heat inside the stroller. Sunshades can be bought from baby supply stores.

## Improving safety at home

Accidents or injuries are the most common cause of death in childhood beyond the first year of life and are a major reason for children needing medical attention.

Most injuries to children do not occur by chance or by bad luck, and are not an act of fate. The majority of injuries are predictable and largely preventable. The term 'injury' is now used rather than 'accident' (accident implies that the event could not have been prevented).

By their very nature, children are active, curious and often excitable. These are all attributes that put them at risk of injury. As a parent or carer, you can do a lot to prevent injury to your child.

## 10 tips for home safety

- Prevent scalds in the bathroom. Reduce the temperature of the hot tap water at the basin, bath and shower to 50°C or fit a thermostatic mixing or tempering valve.
- Use door barriers across kitchen and bathroom doors.
- Store medicines and cleaning products out of reach and in lockable cupboards.
- To prevent choking, choose age-appropriate toys with no parts of the toy smaller than a 'D' size battery. Small parts can be a hazard and can choke a child less than three years of age.
- Avoid feeding your baby raw pieces of carrot and raw apple. Shred, grate or steam hard fruit and vegetables to reduce the risk of choking. Peanuts are not suitable for children under the age of five. Teach children to sit quietly while they are eating.
- Keep cups of hot tea and coffee out of reach of children.
- Stay with children at all times when they are in the bath.
- Keep nappy buckets off the floor and make sure they have a firm, well-fitting lid.
- Place a fixed guard around heaters and open fires; install smoke detectors and practise your evacuation plan.
- Choose nursery furniture that meets Australian Standards.

## Where to get help

- Maternal and child health nurse
- Your doctor
- National SIDS Council of Australia Tel. 1300 308 307
- The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- The Resource Centre for Child Health and Safety (CHAS) Tel. (03) 9345 6429
- VicRoads, Road Safety Telephone Information Service Tel. 1300 360 745
- RACV Tel. 137 228 – anywhere in Victoria
- Consumer Affairs Victoria Tel. 1300 55 81 81

## Things to remember

- Always put your baby or child in an approved restraint when travelling by car.
- Always use the five-point safety harness in your high chair, stroller or pram. This harness goes over your baby's shoulders, round their waist and between their legs.
- Put your baby to sleep on their back and keep fluffy toys and doonas out of the cot.
- Do not let anyone smoke in the house, in the car or near your baby.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Royal Childrens Hospital - Safety Centre

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