



Sleep safe and sound

BABY WHISPERER **DOROTHY WAIDE** SHARES ADVICE ON SAFE SLUMBERS FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS, SO EVERYONE CAN SLEEP PEACEFULLY.

As parents and caregivers we're often overwhelmed by the vast amount of baby sleep products on the market. My first advice is to do your research and ensure that what you want to buy meets the recommended safety standards. It's also important you use things as per the manufacturer's instructions. If we use products incorrectly or alter them, we set ourselves up to make errors. If in doubt, check out the Government's product safety trading standards website¹.

CHOOSING A BASSINET

If you're going to go with a bassinet or a Moses basket, ensure it has good air flow, a firm, flat mattress and can't easily be knocked over. Ideally your baby's head shouldn't sink into the mattress more than a few millimetres.

Hammocks are popular in New Zealand and again, ensure you check the mattress as babies need to sleep on a firm, flat mattress to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Many of my client families sleep their baby in a hammock during the day and a cot overnight.

CHOOSING A COT

If you're buying a second-hand cot, it must meet the product safety guidelines

mentioned above. If you already have a cot and are buying a new mattress, it's important to ensure the mattress fits the cot snugly and there are no gaps between the ends and sides of the cot and the mattress. Again, check that the mattress is firm and flat and that your baby's head ideally does not sink into it more than a few millimetres.

It's important to wash your baby's mattress protector regularly, and to air the cot mattress at least once a week. I have had clients look at me sideways when I aired a nursery or bedroom in the middle of winter, but I believe it's important to do so, even for just a few minutes.

COT BUMPERS

Years ago, nice puffy bumpers were recommended to protect babies from bumping themselves on the cot sides. We now know bumpers affect good air flow in the cot, and that they can also enable an adventurous baby or toddler to climb out. Now the recommendation is either an air vent mesh bumper which allows air flow through the cot, or vertical cot bumpers on every slat. The vertical cot bumpers allow good air ventilation as well but do take time to install; I'd recommend just doing the sides unless you have a baby or

toddler who moves around a lot and often ends up at the head or bottom of the cot.

CUDDLY TOYS

I always look at what should and shouldn't go into a cot to ensure our babies are kept safe. It's advisable not to have any cuddly toys or white noise equipment in the cot when your baby is sleeping. As Baby grows, you can introduce a comforter or cuddly toy. A comforter shouldn't be able to cover your baby's face and not be moved, so try covering your own face with your baby's comforter to ensure that the fabric is lightweight and breathable enough. Many babies tend to cover their eyes with their cuddlies, often because the room is not dark enough - quality 100% blackout blinds are a good investment.

WRIGGLY BABIES

Do you have a baby who loves rolling and wriggling around their cot, and often ends up in the corners in an unsafe position? Or perhaps you have a 10-month-plus baby who loves to climb? A good product to ensure their safety is the Safe-T-Sleep. I also recommend the Safe-T-Sleep for reflux babies, as it enables you to raise the head of the cot slightly while allowing Baby to stay lying in the same position.



TO SWADDLE OR NOT TO SWADDLE?

There's a bit of debate over swaddling. Babies are born with amazing natural reflexes, such as the 'startle' or Moro reflex, which they develop while still growing in the womb. Swaddling is said to take away the baby's ability to startle, a reflex which helps them reset their heart rate, breathing and temperature.

I encourage parents to swaddle their babies, however it is important that when swaddled, your baby is able to make small startle movements which, in turn, are controlled by the swaddle. This way they'll still feel secure but won't so easily wake themselves up.

My favourite swaddles are ones that allow arm movement while falling asleep,

such as the Dimples Snugglesac, large muslin cloths, and the Love to Dream Swaddle Up. I encourage you to either swaddle your baby with their arms up by their head, or across their chest. If you're swaddling your baby with their arms down by their sides, ensure they're still able to make small startle movements. If using a muslin swaddle or a large piece of similarly breathable material, always leave the foot of the wrap unfolded as this allows Baby good foot movement. It's also important that the swaddle is loose around Baby's hips.

While your baby is swaddled it's okay to tuck them in with a light blanket or top sheet, but ensure it comes up no higher than their chest.

BABY SLEEPING BAGS

Once a baby comes out of their swaddle, I transition them into sleeping bags. Sleeping bags are a safer way to sleep in cots and they also replace top sheets and blankets. Make sure there's good air ventilation between your baby's chest and the sleeping bag, and that it doesn't have a hood. I also look at the leg space available - there should be enough space for your baby to easily move their legs. Sleeping bags come in different sizes, shapes and fabric weights, so check which one is right for the season. Sleeping bags can be expensive but if you care for them, they will last for years. They can be used for the next baby, or paid forward to other family members or your friends.

I don't use blankets and top sheets with my clients, but I always find other ways of using the gorgeous heirloom blankets or blankets that have been knitted by a friend or family member. For example, if you use these special blankets for family photos and outings, they won't wear out and can be kept and passed down through the generations.

SAFE BED SHARING AND CO-SLEEPING

Again, this is a subject of hot debate, and again, it comes down to you doing your research and ensuring what you do sits well within your own parenting guidelines. If you decide to bed-share, it's important to do so safely. In New Zealand, we have flax wahakura and the plastic Pēpi-Pod available. If you're using a Pēpi-Pod, it's important to read the manufacturer's safety precautions first. It is recommended that baby doesn't sleep in a padded Pēpi-Pod or nest unattended, however they're great for when you go out and need somewhere for baby to sleep with you in attendance.

SLEEP AIDS

Whether or not you use sleep aids for your baby is completely up to you, and there's no right or wrong here! For me, a sleep aid is something you use to help your baby self-settle - things like white noise or dummies (pacifiers). Before you make a decision to use one though, ask

yourself these questions: could you take it with you when travelling, and what would happen if there was an electrical blackout or you couldn't get batteries (for example due to lockdowns or earthquakes).

Used correctly, sleep aids can be useful, but try to encourage your baby to sleep without them, and bring them in only as a tool to help. In the early days, the best sleep aid is your body. If you're holding your baby for long periods of time, remember to keep your body still (as it represents the mattress!) and only make a small movement on your baby's body.

Let's look at the options.

WHITE NOISE

If you use a special white noise device or an app, it's important to know the recommendation is to play it between 50 and 75 decibels, and that the device is not left in or close to the cot. White noise is excellent in those early hours of the morning when our babies and toddlers are in their lightest sleep cycles. I often recommend putting the white noise on a timer and placing it under the window or close to the bedroom door, as this can help prevent babies and toddlers from waking to the birds, traffic or the various house noises happening at that time of the day. I often use continuous white noise when resettling also.

DUMMIES

I'm often asked if dummies are useful or not, but it's often *how* we use them that becomes the issue. I always recommend people don't 'plug' a baby straight away (ie don't put the dummy in as soon as they cry, but try waiting a few minutes first). Some research also suggests that using a dummy for sleeping could reduce the risk of Sudden



Unexplained Death in Infancy (SUDI). If you're out and about and are afraid you'll lose the dummy, use a dummy clip, but not in the bassinet or cot when your baby is sleeping. If your baby is older, I'd encourage you to attach the dummy to a small cuddly toy. It's important to replace dummies periodically, and also to wash and sterilise them regularly.

CAR SLEEPING

Carseats are essential for travelling in a vehicle and it's important when choosing and installing one that you read both the vehicle manual and the carseat manual. An incorrectly fitted carseat is not safe - if you're unsure how to install a carseat correctly, New Zealand has qualified child restraint technicians (CRTs) and it's my advice to utilise these people to give you peace of mind. Find your local CRT at sittight.co.nz.

There is no published evidence recommending how long a baby should be in a carseat, but a good rule of thumb is to only allow two hours at a time. If you're travelling long distances, ensure

you have adequate breaks so your baby can stretch out before the next part of the journey.

Babies grow quickly, and capsule carseats in particular have different weight and height requirements, so it's a good idea to check yours periodically to ensure it is still suitable for the weight and height of your baby.

If you're involved in a car accident, it is important to buy a new carseat and destroy the seat that was in the accident. Again, if buying a second-hand capsule, it's important to know the history of the seat to ensure it will be safe for your baby. Most carseats have an expiry date on them, so again, please ensure you check this date, especially if you're saving it to use for more than one baby. For more on carseat safety, check out the article on page 94.

There are so many things to think about but do remember this is your time to parent, so do your research and then make it work for you and your family. Also less is best, so work within your budget. •

Dorothy Waide started her career as a Karitane Mothercraft Nurse in the 1970s and she's now one of New Zealand's leading baby and toddler sleep experts. Following the success of *You Simply Can't Spoil A Newborn*, Dorothy's second book *Simply Parenting - From 12 Weeks To 12 Months* will be available in August 2020. Find Dorothy at facebook.com/BabyWithin and babyhelp.co.nz.

1. productsafety.tradingstandards.govt.nz/for-consumers/keeping-kids-safe/cots/