



Infant Nutrition Council

Industry supporting both Breastfeeding & Infant Formula

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Breastfeeding and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

The view that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is a preventable condition has been reinforced by the positive results of numerous campaigns in several countries. Sometimes advice about the relevance of breastfeeding is given, sometimes it isn't.

To see if this is an important part of such prevention programs, a German Study of SIDS was undertaken by a multi-country expert group including Professor Ed Mitchell from Auckland Medical School.

The study involved examining the data from 333 instances of SIDS and 998 matched control infants.

While 82.9% of the control series infants were breastfed at 2 weeks of age, only 49.6% of those who died of SIDS were. If the infants were still exclusively breastfed at 1 month of age the risk of a SIDS death was still one-half that of those not breastfed, and even partial breastfeeding at one month seemed to reduce the risk although this was no longer statistically significant. Examining the data in a variety of ways did not alter these conclusions.

The study does not imply that formula feeding is a cause of SIDS, but rather just that breastfeeding is protective. The explanations for this difference were not sought. Previous studies have suggested mechanisms varying from effects on the immune system through to differences in maternal-infant interaction, but none thus far has been accepted as proven. It is extremely difficult in such studies, even when numbers are quite high as in this case, to be certain that some factor or factors related to why those mothers chose not to breastfeed, or could not, might not be responsible. This study does not answer that question; it is simply taken as an indication that advice to breastfeed if at all possible should be included in any SIDS prevention programs while being aware that the most significant risk factor for SIDS is related to the prone (tummy) sleeping position.

M.M. Vennemann, T. Bajanowski, B. Brinkmann, G. Jorch, K. Yücesan, C. Sauerland, E.A. Mitchell, and the GeSID Study Group: Does Breastfeeding Reduce the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome? *Pediatrics* 2009,123:e406-e410. Online publication. doi:10.1542/peds.2008-2145.

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There are four main messages in the campaign to reduce the risk of SIDS and fatal sleep accidents:

- Sleep baby on the back from birth and not on the tummy or the side
- Sleep baby with face uncovered
- Avoid exposing infants to cigarette smoke before birth and after
- Sleep baby in its own safe sleeping environment next to the parents bed for the first six to twelve months of life.

More information about reducing the risk of SIDS or fatal sleep accidents can be found at: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/preventing-sudi-healthpractitioner-info-apr08#info> or http://www.sidsandkids.org/safe_sleeping.html