



The Wellness Family

Ada Family Chiropractic Keeps You Informed

Swaddling for Newborns

The practice of swaddling was used for thousands of years and quite popular until the 1700's when it was slowly abandoned as many cultures considered it to be old fashioned or barbaric. However, it has remained popular in Europe and there now appears to be a resurgence of the practice in North America, especially among those in the holistic movement. Every decision a new parent makes comes with some apprehension; this one should be a little easier with more information.

What is Swaddling?

The purpose of swaddling is to calm the infant and promote sleeping. This technique has often joined in the traditional soothing techniques of nursing, massage, skin-on-skin contact and baby carrying.

Patricia Hughes, MD, notes on the website More4kids.com that swaddled babies will cry less, "The movements of this arms and legs cause the baby to startle. This is upsetting to the baby and causes over stimulation. When they are over stimulated, newborns cry in an attempt to block out the stimuli. When they are swaddled, the jerky arm and leg movements are kept to a minimum, resulting in less crying."

Another benefit noted by Dr. Hughes is that swaddled babies are less likely to scratch their faces with their fast growing nails.

Holistic medical physicians Lauren Feder, MD, author of *Natural Baby and Childcare*, and Randall Neustaeter, OMD, author of *The Holistic Baby Guide*, both recommend the practice of swaddling in their books.

Why Consider Swaddling

In his book, *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, pediatrician, Harvey Karp, M.D., suggests that a newborn needs the imitation of the womb in their first three months. The easiest way to get an infant to sleep is by re-creating the sensation of being in the womb. This is accomplished with the "five S's" which are: swaddling; the side or stomach position; the shushing sound; a swinging motion; and sucking.

Is Swaddling Safe?

Bradley Thach, MD, addresses the issue of safety with the article, *Does Swaddling Decrease or Increase the Risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?* In his research he determined the following: "Fortunately in the present study, as noted previously, swaddling does not appear to impair sub-cortical arousals that are essential for adequate pulmonary function and appear to be the primary mechanism in terminating obstructive apnea in infants."

In an extensive review, Dr. Karp, in his article *Swaddling: Boosts Baby Sleep, Stops Colic and Reduces Infant Risks*, addresses the concern of swaddling increasing or decreasing the possibility of SIDS or suffocation. He notes that two studies have shown that babies who sleep on their back and are swaddled have a 33% less risk of SIDS than unwrapped back-sleeping babies.



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He suggests that swaddling might actually reduce SIDS and accidental suffocation due to the following benefits:

- Boost baby sleep so parents are not tempted to place baby in the dangerous tummy sleep position
- Boost baby sleep so parents aren't tempted to bring baby into the adult bed. Parent's profound slumber could be hazardous if they fall deeply asleep while holding their baby, especially if they sleep in a dangerous location (e.g. couches or beds)
- Keep babies from accidentally rolling onto the stomach. Babies who always back sleep – but accidental roll to the stomach – have an 8-37 times increased SIDS risk swaddled babies are less able to roll onto stomach
- Promote breastfeeding. Swaddling reduces infant crying and boosts sleep, factors known to lead to early cessation from depression, exhaustion, lack of confidence in milk and reduced family/physician support

Another possible swaddling concern is its potential effect on nursing. This appears not to be an issue. In fact, the baby being calmer may enhance breastfeeding and improve maternal wellbeing.

Hip dysplasia has also been suggested as a potential negative result of swaddling, but the International Hip Dysplasia Institute states it's safe. When swaddling be sure that the hips are positioned in slight flexion (slightly bent) and abduction (away from the body). As long as the baby can bend their legs and move their lower extremities, swaddling may actually benefit the infant.