



The 5 S's for newborn sleep

The 5 S's come from Dr Harvey Karp - a well-known American paediatrician. His approach is that, during the 4th trimester, parents need to simulate the womb environment their baby is used to, to trigger their calming reflexes & settle them to sleep.

Swaddle

Swaddling your baby firmly, with their arms down/hands up on their face (some babies prefer it this way) recreates the same snug feeling they had in-utero. It also prevents their startle reflex from waking them up shortly after going to sleep, so it helps with longer stretches of sleep. A swaddled baby responds much faster to the other 4 S's!

- Always put your baby to sleep on their back. Never put a swaddled baby to sleep on their front or side. If you are settling your baby to sleep in a side position, make sure you're rolling them onto their back, once asleep.
- Make sure baby doesn't overheat: use thin, breathable materials, like cotton, muslin, merino. Avoid man-made fabrics like polyester, fleece or similar.
- Keep the swaddle below your baby's shoulders: their neck & head has to be uncovered at all times.
- Wrap your baby firmly but gently, so they can breath freely.
- Make sure the technique you are using is secure and the swaddle can't come undone by your baby wriggling, which might pose a danger, if they end up covering their face.

- Use a hip-healthy swaddling technique to reduce the risk of hip dysplasia. This means your baby should be able to move their hips and knees freely and their legs can fall into a natural “frog leg” position.
- Got a friend/ family/ Whanau member looking after your baby? Take your time to show them & to explain how to safely swaddle and make sure they know to always put your baby on their back for sleeping.



For more straight forward options (no wrapping required!) check out fitted swaddle options like the miracle blanket or Ergo pouches. While super popular (for good reasons!) I personally don't recommend the arms up swaddle bag from Love To Dream for newborns, as for most infants they still give too much room to help with the Moro/startling reflex.

Shush

Loud shushing emulates the whooshing of your blood around your arteries, experienced by your baby in-utero. These relaxing sounds, some researchers believe, sit at around 80db.

While you would never leave a white noise machine/ shusher going at this volume permanently, you can use it this loudly while trying to calm an upset baby-they have to be able to hear the shushing noise over their crying.

Once your baby is calm, turn it down to a safe volume (50- 55db, which is about the volume of a running shower) and place your white noise machine about 2 meters away from their head.

Same with your own voice: an upset baby will calm quicker with louder shushing, while once calm, a lower volume will do the trick.

Side/Stomach

Being laid on their back can be an unsettling position for your baby, leaving them with that feeling of falling & triggering their Moro/startle reflex.

The side or stomach position can be very calming for your baby. Being laid on their side, or having their stomach pressed into your chest/shoulder, switches off the Moro reflex and triggers a calming reflex within them.

While you would never leave your baby to sleep on their side or stomach, you can settle them to sleep on their side and gently turn them back onto their back once they are asleep.

Lying flat on their back is the safest position for your baby to sleep in.

Swing

In-utero, babies experience movement all the time. Not the smooth rocking we may associate with cradling a baby to sleep, but reasonably fast, jiggly movement.

You can achieve these small jiggly movements by 'swinging' or jiggling your baby from side to side, or patting your baby's back.

For the jiggling or patting to be effective in helping calm an upset baby, you need to see a bit of a head jiggle, as if they are in the stroller or car. This motion will trigger your baby's calming reflex.

Always make sure that your baby's head is held in a stable position, where they can breathe easily and to never shake a baby.

Suck

Sucking is described by Dr Karp as the icing on the cake for settling a crying baby. Introducing a pacifier/dummy triggers the sucking reflex, which is a huge help in calming an upset baby.

In the snug environment in the womb, babies are often able to find and suck their fingers. However, when out of the womb, they have a lot less control over their hands, so they rely on help to suck which is where a dummy comes in handy.

Dummy use has also been associated with lowering the SUDI risk.

Nutritive sucking (feeding) should never be replaced with non-nutritive sucking (dummy) - if you suspect your baby is hungry, feed them and offer the dummy (if they are still unsettled) after a full feed.