



## **Does Breast Feeding Reduce the Risk of SIDS?**

**Dr Peter P W Weiss  
Vice President Research**

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International Children Medical Research Association, 56 Middleton Hall Road, Kings  
Norton, Birmingham B30 1BY, United Kingdom  
Email: [ppwweiss@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ppwweiss@blueyonder.co.uk)

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### Summary

Although there are a few studies that demonstrate breast feeding has a protective effect, there are many that show little or no effect. Studies suggest that factors associated with breastfeeding, rather than breastfeeding itself, are protective against SIDS.

The AAP in their recommendations on reducing SIDS stated:

*Although breastfeeding is beneficial and should be promoted for many reasons, the task force believes that the evidence is insufficient to recommend breastfeeding as a strategy to reduce SIDS.*<sup>1</sup>

### Literature search

After reviewing the literature, it is our opinion that the best summary available is supplied by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommendations published in 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Physiologic sleep studies of infants demonstrate that breastfed infants are more easily arousable than their formula-fed counterparts during sleep,<sup>2,3</sup> which may explain a possible protective effect against SIDS.

However, epidemiologic studies have not been consistent in demonstrating such a protective effect. Although some studies show a protective effect of breastfeeding on SIDS,<sup>4-6</sup> others do not.<sup>7-13</sup> In addition, a recent article has demonstrated that although breastfeeding is associated with decreased postneonatal deaths overall, it is not associated with a reduced risk of SIDS.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the case-control studies demonstrate a protective effect of breastfeeding against SIDS in univariate analysis but not when confounding factors are taken into account.<sup>7-11</sup> These results suggest that factors associated with breastfeeding, rather than breastfeeding itself, are protective. One of these possible factors is nonsmoking, which is associated with a decreased incidence of SIDS and with both increased initiation and duration of breastfeeding.<sup>15-19</sup>

Although breastfeeding is beneficial and should be promoted for many reasons, the AAP task force believes that the evidence is insufficient to recommend breastfeeding as a strategy to reduce SIDS.

Peter P W Weiss  
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