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The science of Swaddling



We learn more about the ancient act of swaddling, including its benefits and the do's and don'ts, with Merino Kids creator Amie Nilsson and baby sleep expert Jo Tantum

WORDS: SUSAN KIRBY | PHOTOGRAPHY: MERINO KIDS

Until very recently, swaddling, the practice of wrapping a baby in a blanket so that it mimics the position and comfort that an infant feels while in the mother's womb, had been having something of a renaissance, with midwives throughout the country advocating its use.

However this age old technique, relied upon by parents for centuries to get their babies to sleep safely and soundly, has now become the subject of some controversy, with midwives giving conflicting advice on the subject to new parents.

The main area of concern seems to be the association with swaddling and SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), however the potential role of swaddling

in SIDS is still controversial, with the few studies that have been done so far coming to conflicting conclusions including some which indicate that swaddling can actually lower the risk of SIDS as it helps to ensure babies sleep on their backs – the recommended sleep position to reduce the risk of SIDS.

Concerned about the amount of seemingly conflicting information available to new parents, Jo Tantum, the UK's leading baby sleep expert, has recently joined forces with Amie Nilsson, the designer and founder of Merino Kids, to help clarify some of this research and offer support and advice to concerned parents. Their aim is to highlight the many benefits of swaddling and address parents' concerns by explaining how to swaddle a baby safely.

Both Jo and Amie are keen supporters of swaddling and whilst they are aware

of the negative press that has surrounded swaddling recently they are keen to point out that swaddling, per se, may not be the deciding factor in any of these stories but that it could be more about how swaddling is handled.

Jo has worked successfully with hundreds of new parents over the years to help them establish a good routine and sleeping pattern for their babies and regularly uses the practise of swaddling.

"Swaddling helps a baby feel safe and secure" says Jo, "it soothes them by reminding them of being in the womb. There are many benefits associated with swaddling, however, as with anything you do with and for your baby, swaddling can present some risks when combined with other factors and it's important to be aware of them and know the independent risk factors associated with SIDS".

How to Swaddle Safely



As a mother of three and a designer of award winning sleep related products for babies and toddlers, Amie Nilsson has researched the subject of swaddling thoroughly and is convinced that done properly swaddling is not only safe but beneficial to babies.

“The swaddling phase provides an ideal transition from womb to the big wide world during not only their key development stages but also their most vulnerable adaption stage” explains Amie.

“Two key considerations when making the decision to swaddle are, ensuring your baby is not going to overheat and secondly that there is no restriction of movement”.

Overheating: The issue of overheating the baby is of concern because FSIDS asserts that it may increase the risk of SIDS, so the importance of the fabric used to swaddle the baby is high on the agenda in choosing the right swaddle. Many parents have overlooked the type of fabric used for swaddling in relation to baby thermal comfort and reduced risk of overheating. Studies on merino wool's ability to breathe and naturally regulate the baby's body temperature has meant that this fabric is not only the most natural next to skin but also physiological comfort test results and sleeping comfort findings, combined with the low flammability, volatile absorption properties and non-irritant properties of 100% natural merino wool

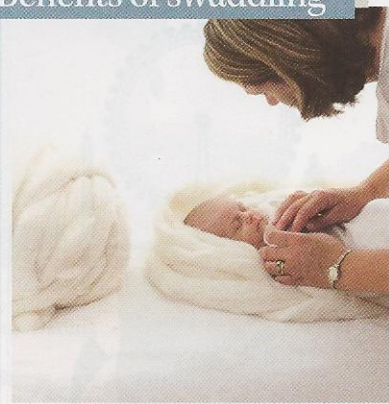
indicate that it is the ideal fibre type to use for swaddling blankets, Swaddles made from 100% natural merino fabric will readily absorb and release moisture to reduce the risk of overheating.

Restriction of movement: the kicking and punching actions which start in the womb play a very important role in early brain development when the neurons are forming. These natural active movements need to be encouraged yet restricted to a level where the babies don't startle themselves and become upset. For this reason the type of fabric you chose for your swaddle wrap is also important. Again merino has just the right amount of stretch to enable the baby to move safely and comfortably without waking up.

Amie has invested a vast amount of time in researching the fabrics she uses in all her products and is convinced that merino is the perfect fabric to use in swaddle wraps as it addresses two major concerns associated with swaddling.

“The growing interest in using 100% natural products also favours merino over synthetic fibre types such as micro-fleece and polyester-based fabrics” adds Amie “Merino wool is a naturally-sourced renewable fibre resource, re-growing on the sheep after shearing. Polyester micro-fleece is a synthetic material derived ultimately from non-renewable petrochemical sources”.

Benefits of swaddling



Jo Tantum is convinced that the benefits of swaddling are proven. “A baby who is swaddled will sleep longer and more deeply. They are also found

to be more restful sleepers, which is a real benefit to the development of a new born baby as sleep is so crucial to brain development. Swaddled babies should always be placed on their backs to sleep with their feet to the bottom of the cot or moses basket. Swaddle for all naps and nighttime to make sure your baby sees the swaddle as a sleep trigger”.

“Swaddling helps to reduce a baby's natural reflex action which can often wake them and so helps to ensure a baby sleeps longer and more soundly. Swaddling also helps sleeping babies to remain on their backs – which is the recommended sleep position to reduce the risk of SIDS”.

Swaddling Do's and Don'ts

- Use a lightweight, breathable fabric to swaddle your baby, such as one made from merino wool.
- Always place a swaddled baby on their back to sleep with their feet at the bottom of the cot.
- Don't wrap your baby too tightly and always use a fabric with some natural stretch.
- Remove all soft surfaces from baby's cot which could cover their heads, faces.
- Don't use cot bumpers.
- Stop swaddling your baby as soon as he can roll over by himself.