

GADGETS, GUIDANCE & GOOD OLD

Common Sense

When it comes to keeping the newest member of your family safe, loved and nourished, at what point do all the gadgets, professional guidance and good old common sense come together? At what point do these three things intersect to

help you make those clear-cut, best parenting decisions?

For answers to these questions, we turn to a woman with over 30 years' experience in prenatal and postpartum care. Janice (Jan) Floystad ran the WIC breastfeeding program in Pinellas County, trained numerous IBCLC's, educated nurses and physicians and currently serves as a lactation consultant for St. Pete General.



JANICE FLOYSTAD

Q: Are there any must-have gadgets and anything parents should be aware of before using them?

A: A safe bassinet, crib or well-tested bedside sleeper is a definite must-have. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that baby be in the same room for the first year of life, but on a separate sleep surface with no obstructions that could lead to suffocation. Keeping baby as close to you as possible at nighttime will ensure optimal breastfeeding, brain growth and emotional development.

What should parents be aware of? Stay away from naptime rockers unless you plan to stand there and make sure baby's face doesn't get buried in those fluffy sides. Never rely on monitors to prevent suffocation (formerly referred to as SIDS), and unless mom has a long waist, avoid nursing pillows as they will position baby too high for a good latch. If you need something on your lap, a pillow is fine.

Another gadget of concern is the swaddler. These are fine if you need to calm a baby and you've exhausted all options. But too many mothers are using swaddlers to keep baby asleep longer at night, and this can interfere with mom's milk supply, as babies are meant to feed at night. Milk-making hormones are 25% higher at night. A swaddler can mask baby's feeding cues by pinning their arms and hands. Babies need their hands to self-stimulate and wake to feed.

During the first 4 months, milk supply is hormone driven, and for moms who cannot nurse during the day, those night feedings are critical for maintaining milk supply. Finally, because the swaddler traps baby's arms, they should never be used once baby is older and starts rolling over.

Should moms always follow the guidance of their healthcare professionals? What about all the warnings regarding babies sleeping with mom?

Humans were meant to sleep with their babies. That's where babies were most safe and could have uninterrupted access to night feedings. But we no longer sleep on hard dirt floors in caves, where there's no risk of suffocation. We sleep on squishy beds with foam mattresses and fluffy pillows. It's sad that this is a danger, but it is. And yet despite the warnings to mom not to sleep with her baby, she does. Why is that? More than 40% of moms co-sleep with their babies even though they swear to their healthcare provider that they don't. Even if she doesn't intend to, she might accidentally fall asleep with her baby while nursing at night because her milk producing hormones are higher in order to put her back to sleep quickly. She is fighting nature.

So think about the environment she is in and make it as safe as possible so that if she accidentally does fall asleep, the hazards are removed. Read the guidelines for the AAP on what constitutes a hazard and follow them. For example, is the bed against a wall where baby could get stuck? Is there a gap between the mattress and the headboard where baby could get stuck? Couches and recliners? Lots of nooks to get stuck in. If there are hazards you can't remove, put a firm mattress on the floor with a tight fitted sheet to lay down and nurse on – away from everything in case you accidentally fall asleep. It's important to thoroughly assess your environment for safety in case you fall asleep with the baby. Do not nurse lying down if you are overtired, obese, medicated, use alcohol, smoke or reside in a smoking household, or there is another person or pet by the baby.

For nursing mothers, my best advice is to look carefully at where you are nursing and think about anything in that environment that could be a hazard and remove it.

Where does good old common-sense fit in with all the gadgets and guidance?

Babies interact with moms for a reason. It's not random. I encourage moms to develop and trust their maternal instinct, because it's there for baby's protection. It's wonderful that moms have access to gadgets that can help make parenting easier and safer and the professional guidance from trusted healthcare providers can help her make informed decisions. But moms come with their own innate skills and good old common sense. And it's free. Trust your instincts, seek guidance to make safe and informed decisions, and look to the tools and gadgets to compliment (not replace) the great abilities you already have.