



28 Days

Two Cases of Apparent Suffocation of Newborns During Side-lying Breastfeeding



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in which the woman lies down with the infant lying alongside her and feeds from the lower breast, is one option (Cadwell, Turner-Maffei, O'Connor, & Blair, 2002; Huggins, 1995; Lauwers & Swisher, 2005; Mohrbacher & Stock, 2003; Riordan & Hoover, 2005; Walker, 2011; see Figure 1). This is thought to allow the woman maximal rest while offering close and continuous contact with the feeding infant (Lauwers & Swisher; Mohrbacher & Stock; Walker). However, labor can be a difficult and tiring process. Following birth, many women are exhausted and/or experiencing significant pain, and might be receiving medication with sedative effects. These factors need to be considered when a newborn is potentially left alone with its mother to breastfeed.

Sudden infant death and apparent life-threatening events on maternity wards are rare, but there are a number of reports in the literature of such events (Andres et al., 2011; Becher, Bhushan, & Lyon, 2012; Dageville, Pignol, & De

breastfeeding has a positive impact on a child's survival, health, nutrition and development (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2008). Among a number of positions offered to mothers to assist with breastfeeding, side-lying,

Abstract The side-lying position is one of several options offered to women in the postpartum period to assist with early establishment of breastfeeding. Many new mothers are exhausted and experiencing significant pain following birth. While the side-lying position for breastfeeding can allow women to get needed rest, it can increase their risk of falling asleep while in this position and potentially smothering their babies. We report two cases of apparent suffocation in newborns on the maternity ward when women unintentionally fell asleep while breastfeeding in the side-lying position. Interventions that may help to prevent such events are suggested. DOI: 10.1111/1751-486X.12053

Keywords breastfeeding | infant | newborn | sudden infant death



Smet, 2008; Espagne, Hamon, Thiebaugeorges, & Hascoet, 2004; Gatti et al., 2004; Mahlmeister, 2005; Nakamura & Sano, 2008; Poets, Steinfeldt, & Poets, 2011). We report here two cases of apparent suffocation in newborns on the maternity ward when women unintentionally fell asleep while breastfeeding in the side-lying position.

Case 1

The mother was a 19-year-old gravida 1 para 0 woman of normal body mass index. The pregnancy was uneventful. The baby was born in a community hospital by spontaneous vaginal delivery at 40 weeks gestation. Apgar scores were 9 at 1 minute and 10 at 5 minutes. The baby's birth weight was 4,364 g. The baby was admitted to the Maternal Newborn service. Assistance with breastfeeding in the side-lying position was provided to the mother. On a routine check 9.5 hours after birth, the baby was found blue, unresponsive and asystolic, lying in bed beside the mother. The mother reported that she had been breastfeeding the baby and had fallen asleep. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation of the infant resulted in recovery of the circulation after approximately 10 minutes. The baby was transferred to the regional center for ongoing care. She was treated with therapeutic hypothermia

for 72 hours for severe hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy. She required cardiac support with inotropic agents. She had one episode of seizure-like activity, which was treated with phenobarbital. Both her EEG and MRI were abnormal. Her neurologic exam remained abnormal with absence of a gag reflex, fixed and dilated pupils and lack of spontaneous movement. She died despite hypothermia and intensive care. Blood culture, metabolic screening and echocardiography were all negative. Permission for autopsy was not granted.

Case 2

The mother was a 39-year-old gravida 1 para 0 woman of normal body mass index. The pregnancy was uneventful. The baby was born in a community hospital by cesarean for breech presentation at 39 weeks gestation. Apgar scores were 8 at 1 minute and 9 at 5 minutes. The baby's birth weight was 3,230 g. The baby was admitted to the Maternal Newborn service. At 45 hours of age, the baby was observed by a nurse to be breastfeeding in a side-lying position and doing well. Approximately 50 minutes later, the nurse returned to check on the mother and baby. The mother, on awakening, found that the baby was not moving. The baby was reported

Figure 1.
Side-lying Breastfeeding Position



Source: UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (2003).
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