

Are Infant Sleep Machines Safe?

Some doctors support the use of infant sleep machines to help babies sleep soundly. However, Dr. Blake Papsin's new study cautions parents on the use of these machines. They may harm a baby's hearing.

Many parents use sleep machines to help their baby sleep. Machine sounds can drown out noise from inside and outside the home. Sleep machines offer the sounds of wind, the ocean, birds, insects, rain and thunder, heartbeats and white noise.

This sleep machine study involved tests of 65 sounds from 14 different sound machines. Researchers tested the loudest noise level when placed at 3 distances from a baby. Distances studied were:

- 11.7 inches – the space from a baby to a crib rail.
- 39 inches – the space from a baby to a bedside table.
- 78 inches – the space across the room from a baby.

Results showed that *at the highest volume:*

- 3 machines exceeded 85 decibels when placed on a crib rail. Eighty-five decibels is the safety limit set for workplace noise.
- All machines exceeded 50 decibels at 11.7 and 39 inches. This decibel level is the recommended limit set for infants in hospital nurseries.
- 13 out of 14 machines exceeded 50 decibels at 78 inches.

The machines may also hinder the hearing pathways to the brain that develop during infancy. A baby's brain must learn the identity of different sounds at different pitches. Some doctors have the concern that "constant white noise" for long periods might interfere with this process.

Researchers have not tested sleep machines to see if they harm or damage a baby's hearing and development. However, parents should use caution with infant sleep machines.

If you use a sleep machine:

- Do your own research. Be informed.
- Never use it on a crib rail or inside your baby's crib.
- Place it as far away from your baby as possible.
- Turn the volume on low.
- Consider using it for short periods at a time.



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