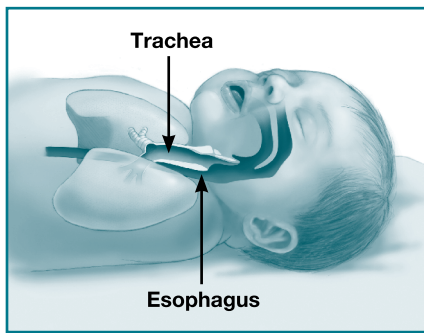




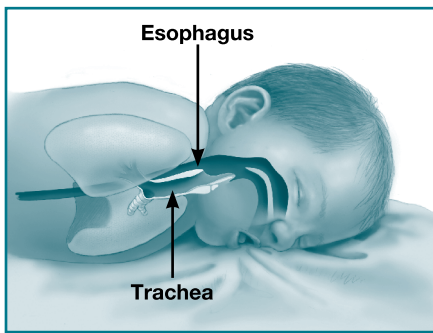
## ***Will babies choke if they regurgitate or throw up while sleeping on their backs?***

No, babies automatically swallow or cough up fluid if they throw up while on their backs. This reflex operates to make sure the airway is always open.

There is no evidence that healthy babies placed on their backs are more likely to have serious or fatal choking episodes than those placed on their stomachs.<sup>12,13</sup>



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

In fact, babies may actually clear secretions better when placed on their backs. When babies are in the back sleep position, the trachea lies on top of the esophagus (see Figure 1). Anything regurgitated or refluxed from the esophagus must work against gravity to be aspirated into the trachea.

Conversely, when babies are in the stomach sleep position, anything regurgitated or refluxed will pool at the opening of the trachea, making it easier for babies to aspirate (see Figure 2). Also, chemosensitive tissue that initiates the reflex is more prominent on the posterior versus anterior pharyngeal wall, thus suggesting an even greater protection when the baby is lying supine. Of the very few reported cases of death due to choking, most of the infants were in the stomach sleep position.

Furthermore, in countries (including the United States) that have seen a major change in infant sleep position—from mainly stomach to mostly back sleeping—the incidence of serious or fatal choking has not increased.<sup>14</sup>