

Parent Express

A GUIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY



TOPIC

Car seats

Dear parent,

With your baby on the way, there is much to do. Some things can wait until after the birth, but one thing you must do before the baby comes is select a car seat. After all, you won't be able to leave the hospital with your baby unless you have a safely installed infant car seat.

Invest in a car safety seat now

Automobile accidents are the No. 1 killer andcrippler of children after the critical early weeks of life, so make riding in a car as safe as possible for your baby.

The most dangerous way for an infant to travel in a car is in an adult's lap. A sudden stop can throw a baby against the dashboard or through a car window. If the adult is not belted in, the child could be crushed between the adult's body and the windshield or dashboard. At 30 miles per hour, a 120-pound adult moves with the force of 2,400 pounds.

Car seats, when properly installed and used, greatly reduce the likelihood of death or serious injury from a car accident.



Children weighing up to 20 pounds who are younger than 1 year old should be placed in approved safety seats especially designed for infants. These seats face the rear of the vehicle and, for greatest safety, should be placed in the middle of the back seat of a vehicle. In an accident, the back – the strongest part of the baby's body – absorbs the shock, rather than the chest or abdomen absorbing it. Generally, the seat is equipped with a five-point harness – a pair of straps

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over the shoulders, a lap belt, and a crotch strap – to secure the infant. A rear-facing seat should be in the reclined position (at 45 degrees) with shoulder straps in the lowest slots. In many areas, safety seats are available for rent from maternity units and health departments.

Convertible safety seats. These seats are designed to be used either facing the rear or facing forward. A convertible seat must be rear-facing until infants are at least 2 years old or until they exceed the height or weight limit for the seat, which can be found on the back of the seat. The seat back should be set in an upright position (at 90 degrees) with the shoulder straps placed through the highest slots.

Forward-facing safety seats. These seats are designed to be forward-facing only and to be used by children older than 2 years. They can be used for children who weigh 40 to 80 pounds, and should be used until the child is at least 4 years old. Forward-facing seats should have a five-point harness.

Booster seats. Children who have outgrown forward-facing safety seats and weigh between 40 and 80 pounds should sit in a booster seat. A booster seat permits the child to sit higher and to use the vehicle's seat belt. The seat belt then fits properly across the child's hips and shoulders. Children should stay in the booster until a seat belt secures them properly without a booster, usually when the child reaches 4 feet 9 inches around ages 9 to 12.

Contact staff with the KARS/Special KARS (Kids Are Riding Safe) program of the National Easter Seals Society at (800) 221-6827 for information about restraints for children with special needs who cannot use regular safety seats.

Whether you select a seat for an infant or toddler – or a convertible seat designed for infants and toddlers – and no matter which safety seat you select, the seat must be secured to the car by the car's safety belt. Be sure to install the seat according to directions. Buckle all children ages 12 and

younger in the back seat.

Consider the following questions when choosing a car safety seat:

- Are instructions clear and easy to follow?
- Are the harness straps easy to adjust?
- Will the harness and/or shield be easy to fasten and unfasten while putting the child in and out several times a day?
- Will the seat fit in your car in the positions where you want to use it?
- Can you thread the auto safety belt through the proper route on the safety seat? Will the belt stay tight?

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Safety tips

- Never leave sharp or heavy objects loose in the car. A sudden stop or collision could turn them into lethal weapons.
- Set a good example – buckle up every time you travel in your car.
- The safest location for your child's car seat is in the center position of the rear seat.
- Don't use an infant carrier as a car seat without its base. It is not safe.
- Don't leave children alone in a car.
- Don't leave car doors unlocked when riding or driving.

Infant carrier seats and safety

Babies love to be the center of things. They also love to be close to you. With an infant carrier seat, a baby can be a part of family life. Use the infant carrier when feeding or carrying your baby. The carrier seat without its base is not for use in a car, however. (You can spoon-feed babies in a safety seat, but when bottle feeding, holding your baby encourages bonding.)

When choosing an infant carrier, make sure the seat is deep enough and has a chest or crotch strap so your baby won't slide out. Look for a seat with a wide base and a nonskid bottom.

Here are some rules for safe use of infant carrier seats:





- Always use the seat belt or crotch strap.
- Stay within arm's reach when the infant carrier seat is on a high place such as a table, sofa, or store counter.
- Be careful when using an infant carrier seat in a shopping cart. Your baby might wiggle and fall out of the cart.

Sources

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Recommended Readings

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