

# Car Safety for Tiny Babies

## Preemies and Low Birth Weight Babies Need Special Care

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## Choosing a car seat for a tiny baby

*Preemie  
in an  
infant-only  
car seat*

Small infant-only car seats fit many preemies well. This kind can be very easy to use and easy to carry.

### Look for these features:

- **A low weight limit to match your baby's weight.** Many car seats are limited to babies 5 pounds or more, but some start at 4 pounds or birth.
- **A 5-point harness** (shoulder, hip, and crotch straps) to keep baby in position best.
- **A front harness adjuster** which is easy to use on every ride.
- **Low shoulder strap position** will help make sure the harness fits well. (See page 2 for more about harnesses.)

- **A harness chest clip** that is easy to open and close.
- **Level (recline) guides** that are easy to see and understand.
- **A level adjuster** that is easy to use to change the tilt of the car seat. (See page 2 for more information.) Look for an adjuster that has many positions.

### Install the car seat in your car before you buy it, if possible.

Follow the instructions of the car seat and the car manual. Make sure it is tightly installed. To check for a tight fit, hold the car seat where the LATCH straps or seat belt hold the car seat. Pull forward and from side to side. It should not move more than one inch.

## The Basics

- Choose a car seat or car bed that is the right size and type for your baby's length, weight, and health.
- Some babies need to lie flat in a car bed (see below, right).
- Avoid a used car seat or bed unless it has all its parts and instructions, has any recalls repaired, and has not been in a crash. Check its expiration date. If none, avoid using it if it is more than 6 years old.
- ALWAYS follow car seat instructions and car owner's manual.
- Put the harness over baby's shoulders and between the legs. Make it snug.
- Install the car seat tightly in the back seat.
- Be sure the car seat faces the rear to protect the head, neck, and spine.
- For best protection, keep your baby rear facing as long as possible—18 to 24 months is safest. At a minimum, keep your baby rear facing until at least one year after baby's due date AND until baby weighs at least 20 pounds.
- Only use the car seat in the car.

## Some preemies must lie flat

Most babies can ride safely in a semi-reclined, rear-facing car seat with low harness slots. However, some premature babies may show signs of trouble when sitting up.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that hospital staff monitor **each baby born earlier than 37 weeks** in a car seat before the baby goes home. This is to check for signs of trouble, such as slow heartbeat, too little oxygen in the blood, or periods of not breathing. Make sure to ask your baby's doctor about this.

If your baby shows any of these signs, he or she may need to ride lying flat in a crash-tested car bed (pictures left and right). Use the car bed until the doctor tells you your baby can sit up

safely. Also avoid using a baby seat or swing at home during this time.

### Tips for car bed use:

- Place with baby's head toward the middle of the vehicle.
- Baby should lie on her back unless the doctor says to do otherwise.

*Angel Ride Infant  
Car Bed® for  
infants from birth to  
9 pounds*

*Cosco (Dorel)  
Dream Ride®*

*for a baby 5 to 20 pounds.*

**Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride**

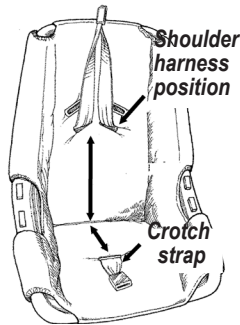
## Checking harness fit

Look for a harness with low shoulder strap positions so it will fit close to your baby's body. Take a tape measure when you shop.

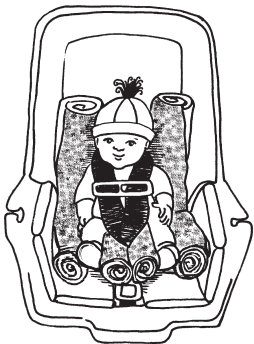
- **Shoulder harness positions:** start with the lowest position. The lower the straps, the better the fit for a baby. Some car seats have positions as low as 5 or 6 inches.

The lowest position should be less than 8 inches.

- **Crotch strap distance:** less than 5.5 inches if possible. Some seats have two crotch strap positions.



For a list of car seats and car beds that may fit tiny babies, go to [www.saferidenews.com](http://www.saferidenews.com).



*Rolled baby blankets at sides and cloth between legs to support a preemie in an infant car seat.*

## Resources

National Center for Safe Transportation of Children with Special Health Care Needs: 800-755-0912, [www.preventinjury.org](http://www.preventinjury.org)

AAP Policy Statement, *Safe Transportation of Premature and Low Birth Weight Infants*, PEDIATRICS, May 1996: 847-228-5005, <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;97/5/758.pdf>

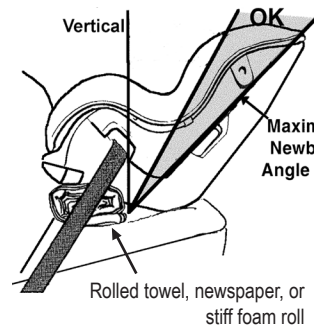
Recall and general car safety information, questions: NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

Car seat safety questions, detailed information, recall list: SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)

Car seat checkups: ask doctor or nurse about a local service or call 866-932-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

## Correct car seat use

- Only use the car seat in the car. Babies need to sleep lying flat on their backs. They also need to lie on their tummies every day.
- Dress your baby in clothes with legs so the harness straps fit between the legs. Avoid a thick snowsuit or wrapping baby in a blanket. Put extra blankets **over** the straps.
- Avoid thick padding under or behind your baby. It would make the harness too loose, so your baby could be thrown out in a crash.
- Put shoulder straps in the lowest position, as close as possible to your baby's shoulders or just below. If the lowest position makes straps come out near baby's ears or higher, use a different seat.
- Put your baby's bottom all the way back in the car seat.
- For support, use small rolled baby blankets or diapers beside baby's body and head and between the legs (picture, left).
- A support pad that came with the car seat can be used if it does not push the baby's head forward. Avoid pads that do not come with the car seat. They can be dangerous.
- Put the harness over both shoulders and between baby's legs. Make it snug, so you cannot pinch any slack in the shoulder straps (picture, right).
- The chest clip should be at armpit level. Do not put it close to the neck or too low.
- Install baby's car seat in the center back if you can get a tight fit there.
- Install the car seat tightly. It should not move more than an inch forward or side to side. **ALWAYS** follow car seat instructions and car manual.



*Rear-facing seat reclined to support baby's head. Always follow manufacturer's recline guide.*

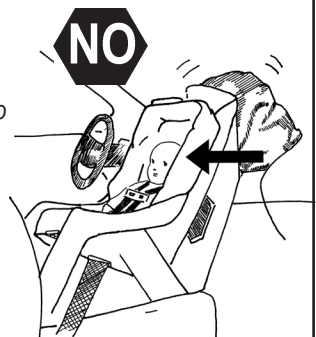
**Your baby should sit reclined**, but not too flat or too upright (see picture, above). Make sure baby's chin does not flop forward, which could block his breathing. Baby's head should rest against the back of the car seat. **ALWAYS** follow the recline angle guide on the car seat or check the instructions. If baby's head still flops forward, try a different car seat.

Some car seats have an adjustable base. If yours does not, wedge a firm roll of cloth or firm foam under it (picture, above).

**NOTE:** If baby has a breathing monitor, oxygen, or other equipment, secure it so it will move as little as possible in a crash. Use a seat belt or wedge it on the floor of the car.

## Dangers of Front Air Bags

*An expanding air bag can kill a baby who is in a rear-facing seat or on someone's lap.*



Know if your car has front air bags. Look in the owner's manual and for warnings on the sun visors or the words "Air Bag" (or the letters "SRS" or "SIR") on the dashboard.

**Always have baby ride in the back seat**, unless the front air bag has been turned off. Look for an on/off switch or sensor. Always have baby face the rear.