

This is the Way Baby Rides Using a Car Seat for Your New Baby

The Basics

- **Baby always rides in a rear-facing car safety seat** (car seat) for as long as possible, at least 18 to 24 months. This is safest. It protects babies from head and spinal cord injury.
- **Baby always rides in the back seat.** The back seat is much safer than the front seat. The center back seat is safest.
- **Turn the air bag off** if your baby must ride in the front seat. (See page 2.)
- **Make sure the seat belt or LATCH attachments** hold the car seat tightly.
- **Buckle and tighten the harness** snugly over your baby's shoulders.
- **ALWAYS follow car seat instructions** and car manual to install and use the seat correctly.

Before your baby is born

1. Go to a car seat safety class. Ask at your hospital or clinic. Car seats can be hard to use correctly!
2. Practice installing the seat and adjusting the straps before your baby's birth. Get it checked by a trained child passenger safety technician. (See Resources)

Take to the hospital:

- baby clothes with legs
- car seat, instructions, and locking clip (if needed for installation)
- two small baby blankets, a washcloth, and two old towels for padding

Choosing a Car Seat for a New Baby

How can I choose the best car seat?

The "best seat" is one that fits your baby and fits in your car. For a baby, you need a rear-facing car seat. Try it to make sure it is easy for you to use. You must be able to buckle the car seat into your car tightly. Try it in every vehicle you use. Exchange it if it doesn't fit.

What kinds of car seats fit a new baby?

Infant-only car seat (1): Small, can only be used rear-facing for babies up to 22 to 32 pounds. It is helpful for carrying baby to and from the car. A big baby may outgrow some infant-only seats as early as age 6 to 9 months.

Convertible car seat (2): Faces the rear for babies and toddlers up to 30 to 35 pounds. Faces forward for larger children. Keep child rear-facing to at least 18 to 24 months old or up to the rear-facing weight limit. Choose one with a harness only (no shield).

Car bed (3): Only for babies with medical conditions who must lie flat. Two are available: Angel Ride Infant Car Bed® (Mercury Distributing, 800-815-6330) and Dream Ride® (Dorel, 800-544-1108).

Features to look for in a rear-facing seat:

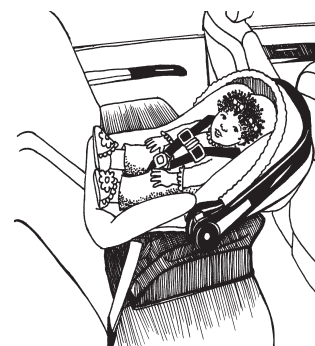
- At least two pairs of shoulder strap slots, with the lowest slots less than 8 inches above the seat. Adjustable crotch strap.
- Harness adjuster in front that is easy to reach and use.

Can I use a second-hand car seat?

A seat given to you may not be the best fit for your baby. It may not fit your car. See above.

A second-hand car seat may have hidden safety problems. Make sure all recalls (if any) have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions. If the car seat has been in a crash, it should not be used again.

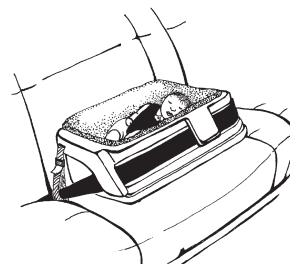
Check for an expiration date on the car seat. If there is none, avoid using a car seat that is older than 6 years. Newer ones are easier to use correctly and may have better safety features. Many newer seats also have higher weight limits, so they can be used longer. Check the labels.



1) Infant car seat for babies up to 22 to 32 pounds; check label



2) Convertible car seat for babies up to 30 to 35 pounds facing the rear



3) Car bed for babies with medical needs

Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride



Resources

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233,
www.carseat.org

National Auto Safety Hotline, recalls: 888-327-4236,
800-424-9153 (tty), www.safercar.gov

Child Passenger Safety Technicians:
866-732-8243, www.seatcheck.org

Others: www.chop.edu/carseat,
www.aap.org/parents.html

Steps to install a rear-facing car seat

1. Place the car seat in the back seat, facing the rear window. The back seat is usually safer than the front, especially in a car with air bags.

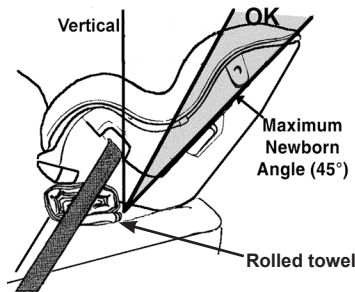
2. Use the seat belt or LATCH straps to attach the car seat tightly. It is very important that the car seat is tightly secured in the car. If the car seat slides around on the vehicle seat, your child could be seriously injured.

Always read the instructions that come with the car seat. Also read the section on seat belts, LATCH, and car seats in your car manual. Do not use the lower anchors and seat belts together unless both instructions say it is okay.

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. The car seat should not move more than one inch. It is okay for a rear-facing car seat to tip a little toward the back of the vehicle.

3. Make sure your baby is reclined enough so his head doesn't flop forward. Always follow the angle indicator on the car seat or in car seat instructions.

To adjust the car seat angle, use the adjuster on the car seat. If there isn't one, put a tightly rolled towel or firm foam roll under the base if instructions allow (A).

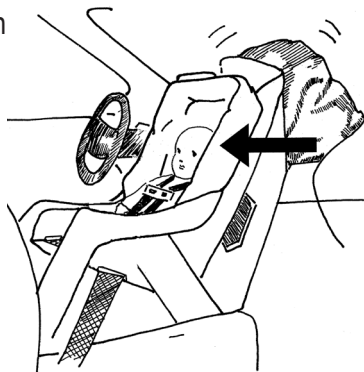


A. Recline a car seat slightly, but never more than halfway back.

Air bag danger: put baby in back!

A baby riding in front with an air bag (B) is in great danger even in a minor crash. The air bag opens with great force in a crash. That could kill a child. The back seat is safer for all children.

If you have a small truck or sports car, do not drive with your baby in front unless the air bag has been shut off. Most very small vehicles have on/off switches or sensors to turn off the passenger air bag. Check the owner's manual.



B. An infant can be killed by the impact of an expanding air bag.

Bringing your new baby home

Dress baby in clothes with legs so the crotch strap can go between her legs.

Put the shoulder straps in the lowest position. Use the slots that are next to baby's shoulders or slightly below them. Put the chest clip at armpit level.

Tuck rolled blankets or towels along the sides (C). Padding helps a new baby sit comfortably with head back. If baby slides down, add a rolled washcloth between her crotch and the crotch strap. Some car seats come with a head support pad or infant insert. If it comes with your car seat, it is okay to use if it **does not push** baby's head forward. Do not use other inserts, blankets, or towels under or behind baby. This can be very dangerous.

Adjust the harness straps to fit snugly, so you cannot pinch any slack (D). Do not use thick blankets or dress baby in heavy clothes. This can make it impossible to get the harness tight enough to hold the baby in a crash. Buckle the harness first and then put a blanket over baby.

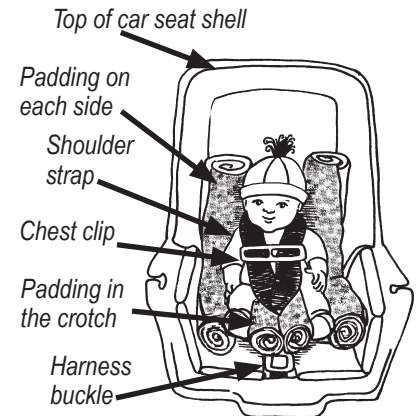
Some new babies cry when in a car seat. If this happens, sit in back with your baby if possible, or talk or sing soothingly. Don't take baby out of the car seat while the car is moving. If you need to take her out, pull over and park in a safe place first.

As your baby grows bigger

Keep harness straps in the lowest position until your baby's shoulders reach the higher slots. Move baby from an infant-only seat into a rear-facing convertible seat when:

- baby's head is 1 inch below the top of the shell or
- baby reaches the weight limit of the seat.

Plan to use a rear-facing convertible seat as long as possible—to 18 months or more. This is the safest position to protect a child's spine from injury. A baby should NEVER be faced forward until baby is over 20 pounds **AND** 1 year of age. (For preemies: at least 1 year from the original due date.)



C. Parts of a car seat, showing padding along baby's head and sides and at the crotch.



D. Check harness tightness. If you can pinch any slack, it is too loose.

Car seats are not cribs. Use a car seat for a baby in the house only for short periods. Babies need to lie flat on their backs to sleep. They also need time to play on their tummies every day.