

Car Safety for Growing Babies

From 4 to 18 Months



Child
Safety
Facts
2009

Babies are safest in the back seat in their rear-facing car seats!

Car Seat Basics

- The rear-facing position is **safest in a crash.**
- Use a rear-facing car safety seat (car seat) for a baby as long as possible, up to at least 18 months. Convertible car seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 35 pounds.
- **NEVER** turn your baby to face forward before his first birthday. For a premature baby, this means waiting until at least one year after her original due date.
- Buckle up your baby in the back seat. The back seat is safer for all children. The center back seat is the safest if the car seat fits properly there.
- **ALWAYS** read and follow the **car seat instructions** and car owner's manual.

Danger: Air Bags

A baby riding in the front seat of a car with an air bag is in great danger. The air bag could kill a baby if it hits the back of the car seat.

Never put a rear-facing car seat in front with an active air bag. Check the car owner's manual for more information about air bags.

A sports car or pickup truck with no back seat or a very small back seat may have a switch or sensor that turns the front air bag off. Make sure the **air bag is turned off** before putting a child in front. (Turn it on again for adult passengers.)

Riding Rear Facing

Rear facing means that the baby is looking out the back window of the car when he or she is in the car seat.

Why should my baby ride rear facing?

Babies and toddlers have weak necks and large heads. The back of a rear-facing car seat supports a baby or toddler's large head and weak neck. A rear-facing seat lowers the chance of serious spine injuries in a crash. **Rear-facing child seats** should be used as long as possible. This is the safest position for a baby or toddler.

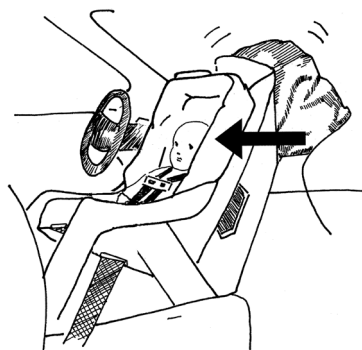
When should I move my baby from a small infant car seat?

The car seat must fit the baby's weight and height. Some babies may outgrow an infant-only seat (car seats used only rear facing) by 6 to 9 months. Check the label or instructions for the top weight limit. Baby is too heavy for the infant car seat if his weight is over the limit. When the top of baby's head comes to one inch below the top of the car seat shell, he is too tall.

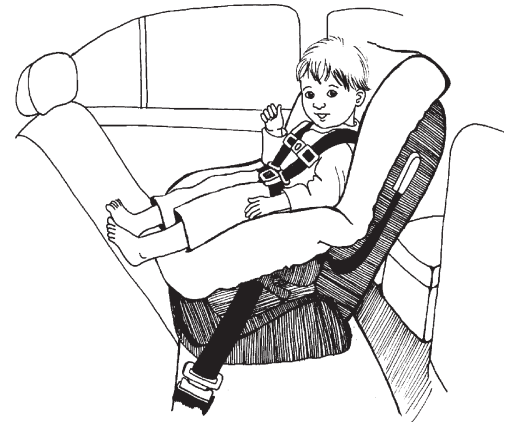
Move baby into a convertible seat when he outgrows the infant-only seat. Use the convertible seat facing the rear window. See page 2 to learn about convertible car seats.

I have a convertible seat. How long can I use it rear facing?

New convertible seats can hold a 30 to 35 pound child safely in the rear-facing position. (Check the weight limits on the seat label or instructions.) Also, the head must be below the top of the car seat.



A rear-facing child can be killed by the impact of an expanding air bag.



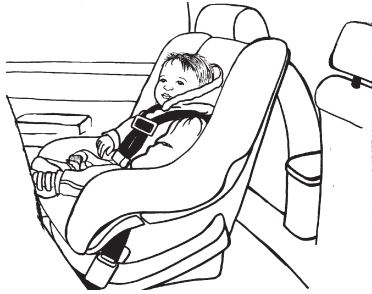
A toddler should ride facing the rear until he reaches the maximum rear-facing weight limit of his convertible car seat.

Is a rear-facing seat safe for a baby who is tall for his age?

A baby or a toddler can ride in a rear-facing car seat until his head gets to one inch below the top of the convertible seat.



Choosing a Car Seat for a Bigger Baby



Convertible seat: can be used facing the rear up to 30 to 35 pounds. Then use it facing forward.

The “best car seat” is one that fits your baby, fits into your car securely, and is one you will use correctly every time.

A convertible car seat is bigger than an infant car seat.

Choose one with a rear-facing upper weight limit of 30 to 35 pounds. Use it rear-facing up to its maximum weight, if possible. Turn it to face

forward when the child reaches the rear-facing upper weight and/or height limit.

Is your baby tall for his age? Look for a convertible seat with high shoulder strap slots, so it will fit for a long time. (Take a measuring tape to the store!)

Is your baby heavy for his age? Look for a convertible that can be used forward facing with its harness to a high weight. Some can be used up to 65 to 80 pounds, unless the child gets too tall. (See list at www.saferidenews.com)

Choose a car seat with a harness that is easy for you to adjust. Car seats with the harness adjuster in front are usually easier to use.

Try a car seat in the back seat of your car before you buy it. Make sure it fits and can be tightly installed. Try the seat in both rear-facing and forward-facing positions.

Warning: Forward-facing Car Seats

Some seats are used only facing forward. Forward-facing car seats are only for children over age 1. Some labels say that a baby as small as 20 to 22 pounds can use a forward-facing seat, but it is best to keep your toddler in a rear-facing seat as long as possible, until at least 18 months old.



Check a second-hand car seat carefully

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 seat has been in a crash, it should **not** be used.
- Check for an expiration date. If there is none, avoid using a car seat over 6 years old. Most newer car seats are easier to use and have better safety features.

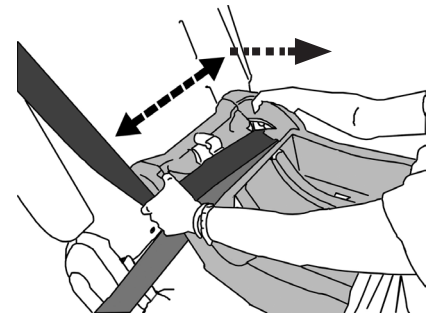
Installing a Car Seat

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.

Use the seat belt or LATCH straps to attach the car seat tightly. 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.

Choose LATCH or the seat belt? Use whichever gives the tightest fit. Do NOT use both, unless the 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.

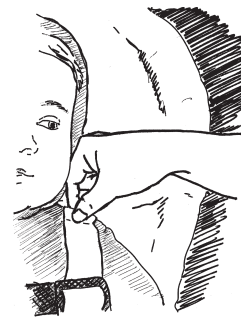


Buckle Your Baby in Snugly

Put the harness straps in the slots just below your baby's shoulders or as low as possible when rear facing.

Adjust the harness to be snug so you cannot pinch the strap between your fingers (picture, right). If an older baby can lean forward, the harness should be tighter.

Avoid dressing your baby in thick clothing. They can make it impossible to get the harness snug enough. Tighten the straps first. In cold weather, put a blanket **over**, not under, the straps.



Use the pinch test. If you can pinch the strap, it is not snug enough.

Resources

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

SafetyBeltSafe Helpline: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org

To find a local car seat inspection station: 866-732-8243, www.seatcheck.org

Other useful websites:

American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/parents.html

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: www.chop.edu/carseat