

Learning About LATCH

The Easier Way to Install a Car Seat

Child
Safety
Facts
2009

LATCH (Lower **A**nchors and **T**ethers for **CH**ildren) is a way to attach a child's car safety seat (car seat) to the car without using a seat belt. It is called UAS in Canada and ISOFIX in Europe.

LATCH can make tight installation easier in many cars, if both car and car seat have the LATCH parts. A top tether gives extra protection for children in forward-facing seats. **ALWAYS** use a tether on forward-facing seats, if possible.

The LATCH system has two parts (see picture, right):

- 1. On car seats:** Tether and lower (LATCH) attachments are on most car seats made after September 1, 2002. Most are straps with connectors. A few models have rigid lower LATCH connectors. **Top tether straps** have been sold with forward-facing car seats since 2000. Some car seat makers sell add-on LATCH lower straps and/or tether straps that can be used for older models.
- 2. In cars (including SUVs, vans, and pickup trucks):** All 2004 and newer models have the LATCH system. Most 2003 and many 2001–02 models also have LATCH. Tether anchors have been required in most cars since 2000. Earlier models can be retrofitted for tethers.

What is the LATCH system in a car?

Check the car owner's manual for locations of tether and lower anchors. Many are marked with the symbols shown below. Each place with a LATCH system has:

Two lower anchors: a pair of small metal bars located where the lower seat cushion meets the seat back. They may be 1 to 3 inches behind the cushion. Hidden anchors are marked with a small round symbol on the seatback (right). A few cars have small tags that say "ISOFIX."

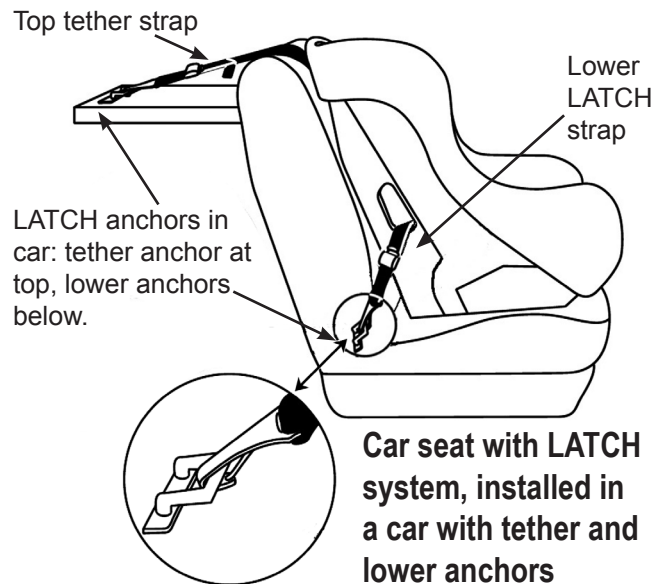


Lower anchor symbol

One tether anchor: a bar, bracket, or webbing strap located behind the seat back. It may be marked with a tether anchor symbol (right). Tether anchors are in different places in different models.



Tether anchor symbol



Newer cars must have LATCH (lower anchors and tether anchor) in at least two rear seating positions. A third position must have a tether anchor to use when installing a car seat with the seat belt. Vans must have at least one LATCH position in the second row of seats.

In the center back, most cars will have a tether anchor. Some cars also have lower LATCH anchors in the center back. (Check the owner's manual.) If there are no lower anchors there, use the seat belt instead (see page 2).

Basics of Using LATCH

Always read and follow instructions for both the car seat **and** the car.

Always tighten LATCH straps after connecting them to the anchors in the vehicle. In most cases, tighten the lower LATCH straps before tightening the tether strap.

Use the seat belt if the lower LATCH straps do not hold the car seat tightly. Do not use both the seat belt and lower straps unless the car **AND** car seat instructions say it is okay.

Do NOT use lower LATCH anchors in the center seat position to install a car seat **UNLESS** the car **AND** the car seat instructions allow it. If it is not allowed, use the seat belt in the center instead.

Never attach two car seats to one LATCH anchor.

Make sure children do not play with the shoulder belts that are not in use. That could be dangerous.

Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride



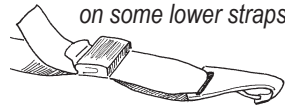
What is the LATCH system on a car seat?

Lower LATCH straps with connectors hook or push onto the lower anchor bars (pictures below). A few car seats have rigid connectors built into the base of the car seat.

The **top tether strap** has a hook that connects to the tether anchor (picture below).



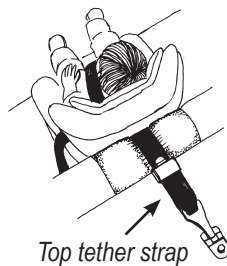
Push-on LATCH connectors on some lower straps



Hook-on connector on tether and most lower straps

LATCH on different types of car seats

- **Rear-facing infant car seats:** Only lower straps are required (no tether). Some have an optional tether. Those with separate bases must have lower straps on the base. Most infant car seat carriers can be installed with a seat belt or a LATCH strap retrofit kit.
- **Convertible car seats (rear-facing and forward-facing):** In the rear-facing position, most use only the lower attachments. Use the tether strap only when the seat is facing forward unless the instructions allow use rear-facing. In the forward-facing position, car seats use both the lower attachments and the tether.
- **Forward-facing car seats:** Most have a top tether (right) as well as lower attachments.
- **Combination seat:** can be used as a car seat with a harness or a booster; check instructions for LATCH use.
- **Car beds, booster seats, vests, and car seats for children over 48 pounds** are not required to have LATCH. There are some that do have LATCH.



Top tether strap and hook

Questions about LATCH

Which is safer, LATCH lower anchors or the seat belt?

The goal is tight installation. The LATCH system and the seat belt are both tested for crash protection. In some cars LATCH anchors will provide a better fit. The seat belt will be tighter in other cars. Always choose the method that works best for you to get the car seat in tightly. ALWAYS use the tether on forward-facing seats with the lower anchors or seat belt.

Can I use LATCH lower anchors to put a car seat in the center?

Do **NOT** use the lower anchors to install a car seat in the center, unless the vehicle owner's manual **and** car seat instructions state that this is okay.

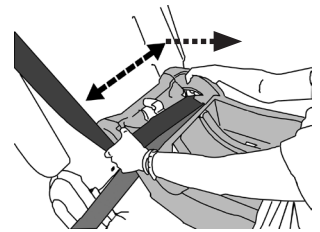
If lower anchors cannot be used, use the seat belt (and the tether on a forward-facing seat). If you cannot get a tight installation with the seat belt (and tether), try using a side seating position with the LATCH system.

Can I install a LATCH car seat with a seat belt?

Yes. All LATCH car seats can be installed using a seat belt instead of LATCH. To make the seat belt stay tight, see the car manual and car seat instructions. **Do not use both the belt and LATCH** unless both car and car seat instructions say it is okay.

How do I check for a tight fit?

Hold the car seat where the LATCH straps or seat belt go through the car seat. Pull forward and from side to side. If the car seat moves more than an inch, it is not tightly secured.



Can LATCH be used with car seats for children over 40 pounds?

Lower LATCH connectors should **never** be used beyond the limit in the car seat and vehicle instructions (40 or 48 pounds). Use the seat belt instead for heavier children. Some car makers list weight limits for the lower LATCH anchors and tether anchors in the owner's manual. Always check the car seat instructions and the car owner's manual.

All car seats with harnesses for children over 48 to 50 pounds come with a top tether strap. Using a tether above the car manual's stated weight limit may have benefits you should learn about. (To find out about using tethers for heavier children, go to www.saferidenews.com.)

Should I use LATCH with a booster seat?

LATCH can be used with some boosters. Check the booster directions about LATCH use. Vehicle anchor weight limits do not apply when the child is using the lap-shoulder belt.

LATCH keeps the booster seat in place while the child climbs in and out. It also holds the booster when it is not in use.

My old car seat does not have LATCH. Is it unsafe?

No. Car seats without LATCH protect well if they can be installed tightly with the seat belt. Some car seat makers have LATCH retrofit kits for some models. However, newer car seats have many added safety features, so it is best to get a newer model.

Should LATCH anchors be replaced after a crash?

Tell your insurance agent if LATCH anchors have been used in a crash. Tell the body shop to check the LATCH anchors for damage and replace them if necessary.

Resources

- NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty), www.safercar.gov
- SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, 800-747-7266 (Spanish), www.carseat.org
- Finding a car seat inspection station near you: 866-732-8243 or www.seatcheck.org