
Planning for Baby – Car Seats

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You will need to take your baby home from the hospital using a car seat. Taking the baby with you presents many changes. The important thing to remember is that the baby's safety should come first.

Items Needed to Transport Baby

- Car seat (See section with car seat information later in this publication.)
- Stroller
- Backpacks and soft carriers

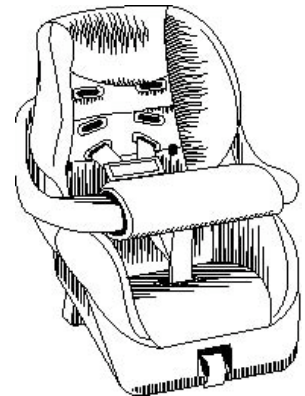
Car Seat Safety

- Look for a seat that meets the higher rear-facing weight limit for heavier **babies less than 1 year old**.
- Infants must ride facing the rear of the car even if they are out of the driver's view in the back seat. In this position, the safety seat protects baby's head and back. Always read the instructions included with the safety seat. Read the section on safety belts and child seat installation in your vehicle owner's manual. Follow both sets of instructions.
- **Children age 1 and weighing at least 20 pounds** should sit in a front-facing child seat in the back seat.
- **Children over 40 pounds and less than 80 pounds** can sit in a booster seat in the back seat.
- Each person must have one seat belt. Buckling two people, even children, into one belt could injure both.
- If no shoulder belt is available, it is much safer for anyone (except small babies who can't sit up) to use just a lap belt than to ride loose. Keep the lap belt low and snug across the thighs. If several children are riding in back, and there are shoulder belts there, let the older ones use the shoulder belts. Put the child riding in the car seat in the middle where there is only a lap belt.



Recycled Car Seat

- Do not use a child safety seat that is more than 5 years old. If you do not have a copy of the manufacturer's instruction book, get one. Make sure that all parts are on the child seat. Find out if that seat has been recalled. For more information on recycled car seats call 800-745-SAFE (English) or 800-747-SANO (Spanish) or visit <http://carseat.org> or <http://aap.org/family/cps.htm>.



Child Safety Seat Check

- Put the belt through the correct slot. If your safety seat can be used facing either way, use the correct belt slots for each direction. The safety belt must stay tight when securing the safety seat. Check the vehicle owner's manual for tips on using the safety belts.

- Keep the straps over your child's shoulders. The harness should be adjusted so you can slip only one finger underneath the straps at your child's chest. Place the chest clip at armpit level.

- Keep your child in a safety seat with a full harness until he or she reaches 40 pounds; it's the law. Then use a belt-positioning booster seat which helps the adult lap and shoulder belt fit better. A belt-positioning booster seat is preferred for children between 40 and 80 pounds. Check on special products for heavy children and those too active to sit still in a booster.



- The child must be tall enough, at least 4' 9" tall, and weigh enough, at least 80 pounds, to sit without slouching, knees bent at the edge of the seat, and feet on the floor to use the adult lap and shoulder belt system without a booster seat. The lap belt must fit low and tight across the upper thighs. The shoulder belt should rest over the shoulder and across the chest.

- Never put the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the child's back.

Air Bag Safety

A passenger air bag can seriously harm a child riding in the front seat of the car.

- Many new cars have air bags for the right front seat. Air bags work with lap/shoulder belts to protect teens and adults. To check if your vehicle has air bags, look for a warning label on the sun visor or the letters “SRS” or “SIR” embossed on the dashboard.
- An inflating passenger air bag can kill a baby who is sitting in the front seat in a rear-facing safety seat. An air bag also can be hazardous for children 12 and under who ride in the front seat.
- If there is no room in the back and you have no alternative, a child over 1 year old and over 20 pounds who is using a forward-facing seat may have to ride in front. Make sure the child is correctly buckled up for his or her age and size and that the vehicle seat is moved as far back as possible. Fasten the harness snugly, and make sure a child using a lap and shoulder belt does not lean toward the dashboard.
- For the nearest child safety seat inspection station visit the National Highway Traffic Safety web site <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/> or call your local police station.



Resources for Car Seat Safety

- Department of Transportation Auto Safety Hotline: 1-888-DASH-2-DOT
- For handouts on recycled car seats and a list of child restraints and manufacturers, look under the Helpful Handouts link on Safety Belt Safe USA, <http://www.carseat.org/>
- Seat Checks list of car seat recalls, http://www.seatcheck.org/tips_seat_recall_list.html
- Local Health Department for information on Virginia’s free car seat program
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>

Remember, these are the basic guidelines to get you started. As you become more comfortable and have a set routine, you will have a better idea what you will need and not need. This is one of a set of fact sheets called *Planning for Baby*. You may also want to see the series *Children and Family Finances*.

This fact sheet was revised from *Planning for Baby – Consumer Issues* by Hayhoe, C., Jamison, S. Dillard, A. F., and Chase, M.
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