

# Baby Car Seat Guidelines



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Every state requires that infants and children ride buckled up.

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## Proper Installation of Your Baby's Car Seat

### BASIC GUIDELINES

Using a car safety seat correctly can help prevent injuries to your infant. The biggest mistake new parents make is keeping the new car seat they received as a shower gift in the box. Many new dads come to the hospital with it STILL IN THE BOX for the nurses to help put it in the car. THEY WON'T.

It is your responsibility to know the proper installation of your baby's car seat. Go to a car seat safety class at your hospital or clinic. If they do not offer this class, check with your car dealership to see if they can guide you to a class. The National Highway and Traffic Safety website, [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov), has child safety inspection station locations. Take the time to know how important it is for proper installation of the seat, harnesses and buckles, and how to position them. Car seats can be hard to install and use correctly without instruction and help. It is a good idea to practice installing and adjusting the car seat before the birth of your baby. If you have trouble at first, you have time to practice and get the proper help that you need.

A baby needs a safety car seat from the moment he takes his very first ride home from the hospital. Although you may feel like it is safer to hold your baby in your arms, IT IS NOT! An infant car seat should state that it complies with the Federal Vehicle Safety Standard 213.

The AAP recommends children ride facing the rear of the vehicle until they reach their second birthday as long as they do not exceed the height and weight limit of the seat. This is to promote continued head and neck safety in the event of a crash. The AAP also recommends children continue to ride on a booster safety seat until they reach 4 feet 9 inches. This is to maintain proper placement of a seatbelt and decrease the risk of internal organ damage in the event of a crash.



*Using a car seat correctly makes all the difference in the world.*

The “best” car safety seat is one that fits your newborn and can be set up the right way for your car. You must use it EVERY time you take your baby in the car. It does not matter if it is the most expensive... if it is not installed properly, it may not protect your baby.

**Take the time to review the following points and remember take a minute to check and be sure:**

- An infant in a rear-facing seat should not be used in front of an active airbag.
- The safest place is in the middle of the back seat (depending on the car).
- Infants should remain rear facing to the upper limits of their infant car seat, graduate into a convertible seat and continue facing rearward until the age of 2. This will keep your children five times safer.

Infant-only seats may come with more than one harness slot. They allow room for your baby to grow. In the rear-facing position, the harness usually should be in the slots at or below your baby’s shoulders. Check the car safety seat manufacturer’s instructions to be sure.

## What are the basic guidelines for proper safety seat use?

**Using your infant car seat correctly:**

- Tightly install a child seat in the back seat, facing the rear. The infant seat should not move more than an inch side-to-side at the seat belt pathway.
- Infant seat should recline at approximately a 45-degree angle.
- Harness straps/slots at or below shoulder level (lower set of slots for most convertible child safety seats).
- Harnesses should be a snug fit.
- Be careful about attaching toys to harness straps or using mobiles to keep the infant occupied. The addition of hard objects is not recommended as they can injure the child in the event of a crash or sudden stop.

Know the history of a hand-me-down! Even if there was a car crash at 5 miles per hour, a child car seat should not be used again.

## Are You Using a Second-Hand Car Safety Seat?

### **DOUBLE-CHECK EVERYTHING!**

A new car safety seat is best. However, if you must get a used seat, shop very carefully. To tell if a used car safety seat is safe, keep the following points in mind:

#### **Do not use a car safety seat that...**

- Is too old. Look on the label for the date it was made. If it is more than 5 years old, it should not be used. Some manufacturers recommend that car safety seats only be used for 5-6 years. Check with the manufacturer to find out how long the company recommends using their seat.
- Was in a crash. It may have been weakened and should not be used, even if it looks fine. Do not use a car safety seat if you do not know its full history.
- Does not have a label with the date of manufacture and seat name or model number. Without these, you cannot check on recalls.
- Does not come with instructions. You need to know how to use the car safety seat. Do not rely on the former owner's directions. Get a copy of the instruction manual from the manufacturer before you use the seat.
- Has any cracks in the frame of the seat.
- Is missing parts. Used car safety seats often come without important parts. Check with the manufacturer to make sure you can get the right parts.

## Has the Car Safety Seat Been Recalled?

- You can find out by calling the manufacturer or the Auto Safety Hot Line at 1-888/DASH-2-DOT (1-888/327-4236), from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm ET, Monday through Friday.
- If the infant car seat has been recalled, follow the instructions to fix it or return it.
- Another good resource is NHTSA at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov).
- Get a registration card for future recall notices for your model.
- Send in your registration card.

## Shopping Carts

You will find that infant-only car safety seats lock into shopping carts, but please DO NOT DO THIS. Although infant seats may help prevent falls from shopping carts, injuries may occur if the cart tips over. The weight of an infant alone in a car seat placed high in a shopping cart makes the cart top-heavy and more likely to tip over. You will find built-in infant seats in some stores' shopping carts. These, too, have been known to tip over. Instead, consider using a stroller while shopping with young infants.



## A REVIEW

### BASICS OF CAR SAFETY SEAT USE

- Always use a car safety seat, starting with your baby's first ride home from the hospital, and always use your own seat belt. Help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
- Read the car safety seat manufacturer's instructions and always keep them with the car safety seat.
- Read your vehicle owner's manual for important information on how to install the car safety seat correctly in your vehicle.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat.
- Never place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has an active passenger airbag.

**Be a Good Example to your children... always buckle up!**