

Birth Care & Family Health Services

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Important Car Seat Information

One of the most important jobs you have as a parent is keeping your child safe when riding in a vehicle. Each year thousands of young children are killed or injured in car crashes.

Proper use of car seats helps keep children safe.

- All infants should ride in a rear facing car seat as long as possible, at least 18-24 months.
- Babies always ride in the back seat. The center back seat is safest.
- Make sure the seat belt or latch attachments hold the car seat tightly.
- Buckle and tighten the harness snugly over your baby's body.
- Make sure your baby is reclined enough so his head doesn't flop forward. Always follow the angle indicator on the car seat and instructions in the owner manual.

When choosing a car seat, be sure to choose a seat that will fit your new baby.

- An infant seat should be small, rear facing only, for babies up to 22 to 35 pounds. A tall baby may outgrow an infant car seat before reaching the weight limit, as early as age 6-9 months
- A convertible car seat faces the rear for babies and toddlers up to 30-45 pounds. It faces forward for older children. This must be kept rear facing to at least 18-24 months old or up to the rear-facing limit.

Using an old or secondhand seat

That safety seat you scored at a garage sale for a fraction of its original price may seem like a bargain, but it could cost your child his life. The same goes for that older-model seat your sister gave you after her child outgrew it.

Not only are used seats unlikely to come with the manufacturer's instructions (vital for correct installation), but they could be missing important parts, have been involved in an accident (even unseen damage can affect the seat's functioning), fall short of current safety standards, or have been recalled due to faulty design. Moreover, plastic gets brittle as it gets older, so a seat that's too old could break in a crash.

If you must use a secondhand seat, make sure it has the original instructions (or contact the manufacturer for a replacement copy), has all its parts (check the manual), has never been involved in a serious accident, and hasn't been recalled.

In addition, to avoid the dangers of aging plastic, SafetyBeltSafe USA recommends sticking with car seats that are ideally **less than five years old and definitely less than ten years old**. You can usually find an expiration date stamped somewhere on the seat.

Bringing your baby home

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

Put the shoulder straps in the lowest position.

Tuck rolled blankets or towels along the sides, which may help baby sit comfortably. It is okay to use a head support or infant insert that came with your car seat if it does not push baby's head forward. Do not add other inserts, blankets, or towels under or behind baby. This can be dangerous.

Adjust harness strap to fit snugly, so that you cannot pinch any slack. Do not use thick blankets or dress baby in heavy clothes. Buckle harness first and then put a blanket over baby.