

# This Is the Way Baby Rides

## Using a Car Seat for Your New Baby

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013

### Car seat basics

- Your baby is safest riding in a **rear-facing car safety seat** (car seat) for as long as possible. It is best to stay this way to at least 24 months—or even longer, if the child fits the car seat size limits. Being rear facing protects babies from head and spinal cord injury.
- **Baby always rides in the back seat.** It is much safer than the front seat. The center back seat is safest.
- **Turn the air bag off** if your baby *must* ride in the front seat. (See page 2.)
- **Make sure the seat belt or LATCH attachments** hold the car seat tightly.
- **Buckle and tighten the harness snugly** over your baby's body.
- **ALWAYS follow car seat instructions** and the car manual to install and use the seat correctly.

### Before your baby is born

- Go to a car seat safety class. Call your hospital or clinic to find one.
- Practice installing the car seat and adjusting the straps. Get it checked by a trained Child Passenger Safety Technician. (See Resources.)

### Take supplies to the hospital

- Small baby clothes with legs.
- Car seat with instructions for car seat and car.
- Baby blankets and a washcloth for padding *around* the harness. (See page 2 for drawing.)
- If your car seat has a base, install it properly and leave in the car.

Make  
Every Ride  
A Safe Ride



### Choosing a car seat for a new baby

#### How can I choose the best car seat?

The “best car seat” is one that fits your baby and fits in your car. For a baby, you need a rear-facing car seat. Try it to make sure it is easy for you to use. You must be able to tightly install the car seat in your car. Try it in every vehicle you use. Exchange it if it doesn't fit.

#### What kinds of car seats fit a new baby?

**Rear-facing-only car seat (1):** For babies up to 22 to 40 pounds. These are smaller types that have a handle for carrying to and from the car. A tall baby might outgrow a rear-facing-only car seat before reaching the weight limit, as early as age 6 to 9 months.

**Convertible car seat (2):** Faces the rear for babies and toddlers up to 30 to 45 pounds. Faces forward for older and larger children. (Keep child rear facing to at least 24 months old or up to the rear-facing weight and height limits.) Avoid car seats that have straps attached to a shield or tray.

**Car bed (3):** Do not use unless a doctor tells you your baby must ride lying flat due to a medical condition.

#### Features to look for in a rear-facing seat:

- Multiple shoulder strap settings, with the lowest position less than 8 inches from the bottom of the seat pad.
- Harness adjuster in front that is easy to reach and use.

#### Can I use a second-hand car seat?

A second-hand car seat may have hidden safety problems. Make sure any recalls have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions. If the car seat has been in a crash, it should not be used again. If you don't know if it has or not, don't use it.

Don't use a car seat that is expired—usually when more than 6 years old. Most are marked with an expiration date. Newer car seats are easier to use correctly and may have better safety features. Many newer seats also have higher weight limits, so they can be used longer. Check the labels.

#### Warning: Car seats are not cribs or playpens!

Avoid using the car seat for long periods of time. Limit use outside the car, and always buckle the harness. Give babies plenty of “tummy time” to play.

### Resources

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:** 800-745-7233,  
[www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)

**National Auto Safety Hotline, recalls:**  
888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty),  
[www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

**Find a Child Passenger Safety  
Inspection Location:** 866-732-8243,  
[www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

**Others:** [www.chop.edu/carseat](http://www.chop.edu/carseat),  
[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)



1) Rear-facing-only car seat for babies up to 22 to 40 pounds; check label



2) Convertible car seat facing the rear for babies up to 30 to 45 pounds



3) Car bed for babies with medical needs

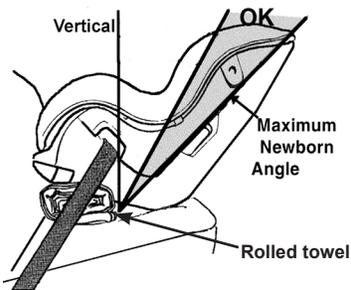
## Steps to install a rear-facing car seat

**1. Place the car seat in the back seat, facing the rear window.** The back seat is safer than the front in all cars, especially one with air bags.

**2. Use the seat belt or LATCH straps to attach the car seat tightly.** 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 in a crash.

Always read the instructions that come with the car seat. Also read the sections on seat belts, LATCH, air bags, and car seats in your car manual. Do not use the lower anchors and seat belts at the same time unless both instructions say it is okay.

To check for a tight fit, hold the car seat near where the LATCH strap or seat belt goes through the car seat. Pull forward and from side to side. The car seat should not move more than one inch. (Do not grab near the top of the car seat to check for tightness. The movement there is okay.)



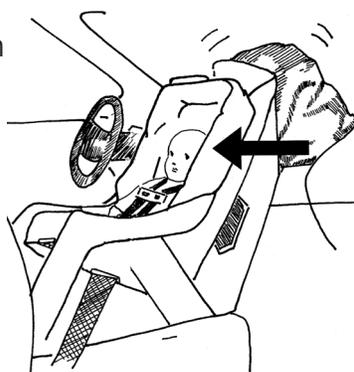
A. Recline a car seat slightly, but never more than halfway back.

**3. Make sure your baby is reclined enough** so his head doesn't flop forward. Always follow any angle-of-recline indicator on the car seat and instructions in the car seat manual. They may say to use an adjuster on the car seat or to place a firmly rolled towel or foam roll under the car seat to set the angle (A).

### Air bag danger: Put baby in back!

A baby riding in front with an air bag (B) is in great danger. In even a minor crash, the air bag opens with great force—enough to kill a child. The back seat is safer for all children.

If your car does not have a back seat, your baby should not ride in the car unless the air bag has been shut off. Most very small vehicles have on-off switches or sensors to turn off the passenger air bag. Check the car manual.



B. An infant can be killed by the impact of an opening air bag.

## Bringing your new baby home

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

**Put the shoulder straps in a low position.**

Use a position that is at baby's shoulders or slightly below them. Put the chest clip at armpit level.

**Tuck rolled blankets or towels along baby's sides (C).** Padding may

help a new baby sit comfortably. If baby tends to slide downward, add a rolled washcloth between her crotch and the crotch strap (C). Read the car seat manual about using a head support pad or infant insert that came with your car seat. It should **not push** baby's head forward. Do not add other pads, blankets, or towels under or behind baby. This can be very dangerous.



C. Parts of a car seat, showing padding along baby's head and sides and at the crotch.

**Adjust the harness straps to fit snugly,** so you cannot pinch any slack (D). Do not use thick blankets or dress baby in heavy clothes. This can make it impossible to get the harness tight enough to hold the baby in a crash. Buckle the harness *first*, and then put a blanket *over* baby.



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

**Sometimes babies cry when in a car seat.** If this happens, sit in back with your baby if possible, or talk or sing soothingly. **NEVER** take baby out of the car seat while the car is moving. If you need to take her out, pull over and park in a safe place first.

### As your baby grows bigger

Keep harness straps in a low position until your baby's shoulders reach the higher slots. Baby must be moved from a rear-facing-only seat into a rear-facing convertible seat when:

- Baby's head is 1 inch below the top of the shell, or
- Baby reaches the weight limit of the seat.

Use a rear-facing convertible seat as long as possible—very likely to 24 months old or more. This is the safest position to protect a child's spine from injury. A baby should **NEVER** be faced forward until over 20 pounds **AND** 1 year of age. (For preemies, count one year from the due date.)