

Car Seat Safety

Checklist and safety tips

This handout gives basic tips to help you to install and use your car seat safely. Please carefully read your car seat instruction booklet.

Checklist

There are so many car seat types and models, how do you know which one is right for your infant? Some car seats are suited for preterm babies. The right car seat fits your baby and your car. Use your car seat correctly every time you travel.

Use this checklist to help you to decide whether your car seat is safe. **All items must be true for your car seat to be safe:**

- My car seat is the right size for my infant. (Check your car seat's height and weight limits.)
- My car seat fits in my car. (Check your car manual for installation instructions.)
- My car seat has never been in an auto accident or crash.
- My car seat does not have any missing parts.
- My car seat does not have any cracks in the frame.
- My car seat is not more than 6 years old.
- My car seat has instructions (manual, booklet, or a sticker on the seat) or I know how to use the car seat.

How to Use Your Car Seat Safely

- The car seat should face the back of the car (“rear-facing”) until your baby is at least 2 years old, or until her weight and height are greater than the guidelines for the car seat (usually not reached until older than 2 years), whichever is later.



Install the car seat in the center of the back seat. Lock the handle on the car seat before starting the car.

- Place the car seat in the center of the back seat. This is the safest position.
- Never place the car seat in front of an air bag.
- Install the car seat at a 45° angle (see photo on page 91). Read the car seat manual for specific instructions.
- The handle should be down and locked when the car is moving.
- The car seat should move no more than 1 inch in either direction where the seatbelt holds it in place.
- Do **not** use products such as fleece inserts, headrests, attachable toys, and belt tighteners that were not installed by the car seat manufacturer. They are not safe.

Placing Your Baby in the Car Seat Correctly



Retainer clip is at armpit level or “tickle zone.”

Harness straps are locked and threaded correctly, not twisted.

Harness straps are at or below your baby’s shoulders.

The straps should fit snugly at the collarbone – only 1 finger should fit under the strap. If you can fit 2 of your fingers under the strap, it is too loose.



Place a rolled towel between the lower harness and crotch area to keep your baby from slipping, if needed.



Place rolled towels along the sides to support your baby's head, if needed.

*Only place a blanket over your baby **after** strapping him into the car seat. Do **not** wrap your baby in a blanket or bulky garment before strapping him into the seat. **Never** use extra padding behind or under your baby.*

Resources

If your car seat is not safe to use, please ask your healthcare team for help finding resources in your area.

If you have questions about car seat safety:

- Call **800-BUCKLUP** (800.282.5587) or visit www.800bucklup.org:
 - To get the most up-to-date information about car seats
 - To find out if your car seat has been recalled
 - To find the nearest place to have your car seat checked
- Take a baby safety class. UW Medicine offers “Babysafe.” To learn more, call 206.789.0883 or visit www.uwmedicine.org/services/obstetrics/Pages/childbirth-classes.aspx.
- Visit the “Child Safety” page of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website at www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/CPS. The site offers current car seat information, installation tips, instructional videos, and more.
- Visit the Safe Kids USA website at www.safekids.org/safety-basics. Under “Search for Top Safety Tips,” choose the risk area called “Car Seats, Boosters Seats and Seat Belts.”

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions about car seat safety, please see the “Resources” section on this page.