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 many car seat types and models. Some car seats are best suited for preterm babies. How do you know which one is right for your infant?

The right car seat fits your baby and your car. Use this checklist to help you to know if your car seat is safe. All of these 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

Use your car seat correctly every time you travel:

- 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, whichever is later. A child usually does not reach that height and weight until she is older than 2 years.

- 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 93). 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**

![Correct Car Seat Placement](image)

- 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, UWMC offers car seats for sale at a good price. Please ask your healthcare team if you have any questions.

If you have questions about car seat safety:

- Call 800.BUCK.L.UP (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. UWMC offers “Babysafe with Infant CPR.” For more information, call 206.789.0883 or visit www.uwmedicine.org/services/obstetrics/childbirth-classes and scroll down to “Babysafe with Infant CPR.”


- Visit the Safe Kids USA website at www.safekids.org/car-seat.

Questions?

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