

Safe Travel

Car seat and safety tips

Choosing the Right Car Seat

There are many car seat types and models. It can be a challenge to know which one is right for your infant.

When you look for a car seat, remember that some models are better suited than others for preterm babies. The right one will fit both your baby and your car.

Once you get the right car seat, be sure to use it correctly every time you travel.

Car Seat Checklist

Here is a 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 to use:**

- 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. (Read the installation instructions for your vehicle and for the car seat.)
- My car seat has never been in an auto accident or crash.
- My car seat does not have any missing parts.
- My baby's shoulders are at or above the shoulder straps in the car seat.
- 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, either a manual, booklet, or a sticker on the seat.

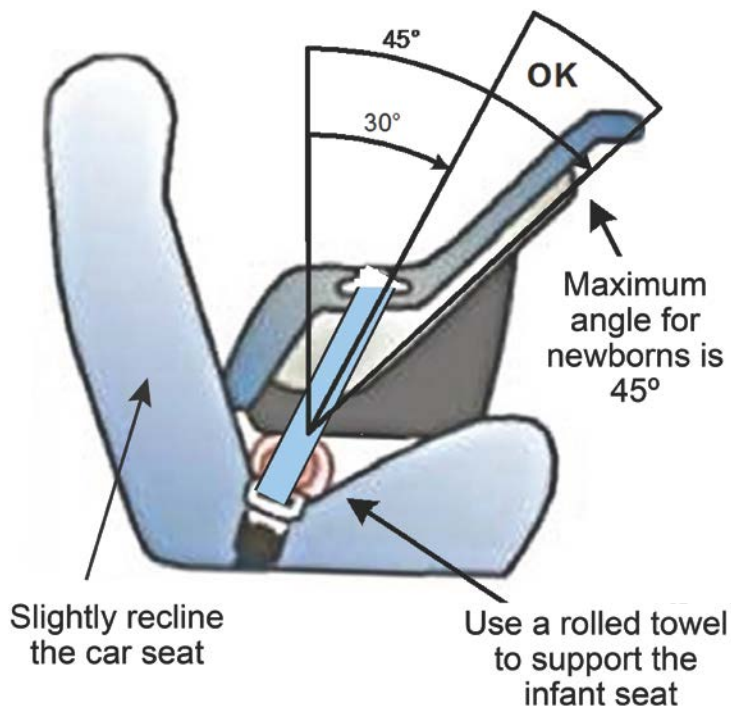
How to Use Your Car Seat Safely

- The car seat should face the back of the car ("rear-facing") until your baby is at least 2 years old, or until their weight and height are greater than the guidelines for the car seat. Children under 2 who ride rear-facing are 5 times safer than those who ride facing the front.



A baby in an infant car seat.

- You may want to buy a seat that you can adjust as your baby grows, in case your baby outgrows their car seat before their 2nd birthday. Some car seats can be used both rear-facing and front-facing. Please see the handouts “A Reference for Proper Child Restraint Use” and “Always Buckle Your Kids” that are included in your NICU materials.
- Car seats must be placed on a vehicle seat that faces forward. Do not place your infant car seat in a seat that faces sideways or backwards.
- It is safest to put the infant car seat in the center rear seat, if it will fit properly. The back of the infant car seat must not touch the back of either front seat of the vehicle. Check your car manual to see if it shows the safest place to put an infant car seat in your vehicle.
- **Never** place a rear-facing car seat in front of an active air bag.
- Install the infant car seat at no more than a 45° angle (see drawing on this page). Read the car seat manual for instructions.
- The handle should be locked and in the correct position when the car is moving. Read the car seat manual for instructions.
- When you are securing the car seat in your car, give a firm tug on the car seat where the vehicle’s seat belt threads through the car seat belt path. The car seat should move no more than 1 inch in either direction.



- Do **not** use products with your car seat that did not come with it. These products could interfere with how the seat performs in a crash and could put your baby at risk. These include fleece inserts, head rests, attachable toys, belt tighteners, and other items.
- It is OK to use soft fabric to help position your baby, if you learned how to do this at your baby’s car seat test in the NICU (see photo on page 3).
- Do **not** put anything extra under, behind, or between your baby and the straps.

How to Place Your Baby in a Car Seat

Side rolls that go from head to bottom to help keep the baby upright for best breathing.

Rolls on both sides of the head provide extra head, neck, and airway support. These rolls sit right on top of baby's shoulders.

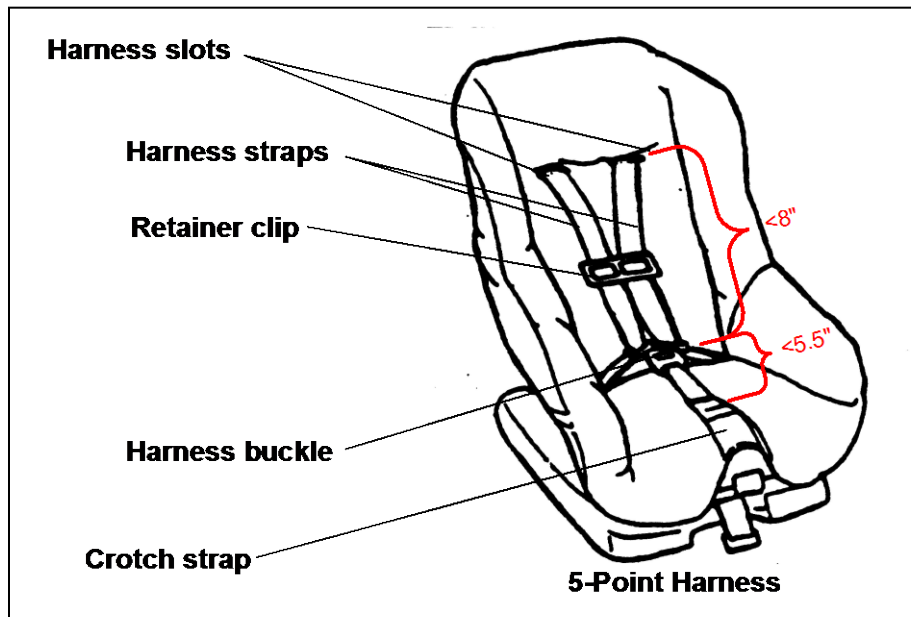
The baby's shoulders should be at or above the shoulder slots in the car seat. Straps should lie smooth and snug over the baby's shoulders. To test this, try pinching the straps over the baby's shoulders. You should not be able to pinch the strap between your fingers.



The harness clip should be at armpit level. If you put your finger on either side of the harness clip, your fingers should just touch the baby's armpits. If you touch the shoulder, the clip is too high. If you touch the tummy, the clip is too low.

The straps should lie flat and smooth over the baby's thighs.

If there is extra room between the baby's diaper and the crotch strap, roll up a cloth diaper and place it between the crotch and the strap. This helps secure the baby's bottom to the back of the car seat.



Remember:

- Do not use any item that did not come in the box with your car seat. It is not safe.
- You may use a towel or cloth diaper to help position your baby, if you learned how to do this during your baby's car seat test in the NICU.
- Even if a product says it is "crash tested," it may not have been tested with your car seat. Be sure to read which car seat models it was tested with.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that all babies ride rear-facing until they are at least 2 years old. The safest practice is for babies to stay rear-facing until they reach the weight limit of their car seat.

Learning More About Car Seat Safety

- If your car seat is not safe to use, UWMC sells car seats at an affordable price. Please ask your healthcare team if you have any questions.
- If you have questions about car seat safety, see the card from the Safety Restraint Coalition that is included in your NICU materials. Or, call **800.BUCK.L.UP** (800.282.5587) or visit www.800buckleup.org to:
 - Get the most up-to-date information about car seats
 - Find out if your car seat has been recalled
 - Find the nearest place to have your car seat checked
- Take a baby safety class. UWMC offers a class called "Babysafe." To learn more about this class, call 206.789.0883 or visit www.uwmedicine.org/Patient-Care/Our-Services/Medical-Services/Obstetrics/patient-education/Pages/classes.aspx. The "Babysafe" class is listed near the bottom of the page.
- Visit the "Parents Central" page of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website at www.nhtsa.gov/parent/index/htm. The site gives current car seat information, installation tips, instructional videos, and more.
- Visit the Safe Kids Worldwide website at www.safekids.org/car-seat. In the "Safety Tips" column on the left, under "Risks," click on "Car Seats," "Boosters Seats," and "Seat Belts."



Use sunglasses to protect your child's eyes from bright sunlight.

Basic Car Safety

- On hot days, make sure that the car seat straps and buckles are not too hot before you place your child in the seat.
- Never leave your child alone in the car, not even for a minute.
- Use sunglasses to protect your child's eyes from bright sunlight.
- Don't forget that your child is in the car, especially on days when your routine is different than usual. Create a reminder by putting something in the back of the car next to your child, such as a briefcase, purse, or cell phone that you will need when you get out of the car.
- Toys, especially toys that are small or loose, can injure your child in a car crash:
 - Choose soft toys for your child to play with in the car.
 - Secure all loose objects and toys to protect everyone in the car.

Bike Safety

- Infants younger than 12 months are too young to sit in a rear bike seat, and should not be carried on a bicycle.
- Do not carry infants in backpacks or carriers while using a bike.

Stroller Safety

- Choose a stroller with a wide base so it won't tip over.
- TO avoid tipping your stroller, do not hang anything from the handles.
- Always use the stroller seat belt and harness. Use rolled-up baby blankets on both sides of your child's head to add support, if needed.
- Before placing your child into the stroller:
 - Open the stroller all the way
 - Make sure the hinges are fully engaged
 - Make sure the wheels are locked
- If you string toys across the top of the stroller, make sure they cannot fall on top of your baby.
- **Always lock the stroller wheels when you stop.**

Safety When You Are Shopping

- It is best to use a front carrier or a stroller while you shop.
- It is best not to place your child in a shopping cart. If you have to place your child in the cart:
 - Make sure your child is securely positioned with the straps that come with the cart.
 - Check all straps and buckles. If they are broken, use another cart.

Wipe cart handles and surfaces with sanitizing cloths. These cloths are often provided by the store, or carry some with you, just in case.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your baby's doctor or nurse if you have questions or concerns.

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