Car Safety for Tiny Babies
Preemies and Low Birth Weight Babies Need Special Care

Make sure your baby’s car seat fits his or her size and needs.

Choosing a car seat for a tiny baby

Some car seats are better for tiny babies than others. Use a rear-facing-only or convertible car seat that fits baby well.

Look for these features:

- **A low starting weight limit.** If baby weighs less than 5 pounds, look for a car seat with a label that says it can be used at 3 or 4 pounds or “from birth.”
- **A small-baby insert or pad.** Some car seats have a special pad for small babies, or one can be ordered. (Do not add a pad that the car seat maker didn’t make for your car seat.)
- **Shoulder straps that can be set to a very low position.** (See page 2 for more about harness fit.)
- **A buckle strap that can be made snug for a tiny baby.** (See page 2.)

Be sure the car seat fits in your car. Try installing a car seat before you buy it, if possible. Follow the instructions for the car seat and the car. The car seat should not move more than an inch when pushed near the belt that attaches it to the car. Follow instructions so that it reclines properly for baby.

The basics

- Choose a car seat that is the right size and type for your baby’s length, weight, and health. If your doctor says your baby should ride in a car bed, see below, right.
- **ALWAYS** follow car seat instructions and the car owner’s manual.
- Put the harness on baby as shown in the instructions. Make it snug against all parts of baby’s body.
- Install the car seat tightly in the back seat of the car.
- Baby’s car seat must face the rear. That protects baby’s head, neck, and spine.
- For best protection, keep your baby rear facing as long as she still fits that way by weight and height (likely 24 months or more). NEVER turn a premature baby forward sooner than one year after her **due date**.
- If using a second-hand car seat, be sure it has all parts and instructions and has not been in a crash. Check for recalls. Don’t use a car seat that is too old—many should not be used longer than six years; check the label.
- Do not use a car seat as a seat in the home. Use it in the car only.
- **Cosco (Dorel)** Dream Ride SE®, for a baby 5 to 20 pounds.

Some babies must lie flat

Most babies can ride safely in a regular, rear-facing car seat with low harness slots. However, some babies may show signs of trouble when not lying flat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that each baby born earlier than **37 weeks** be monitored in a car seat by hospital staff before going home. Staff will check for danger signs, like a slow heartbeat or a breathing problem. Ask your baby’s doctor about this.

If your baby has trouble riding in a regular car seat, the doctor might say baby may ride only when lying flat in a crash-tested car bed (pictures left and right). Use the car bed until the doctor tells you your baby can sit up safely. Also, avoid using a baby seat or swing at home during this time. (Car bed models are listed on the next page.)

Tips for car bed use:

- Install so that baby’s head is toward the middle of the car.
- The doctor will tell you the safest way for baby to lie (usually on the back).

AngelRide Infant Car Bed®, for use from birth to 9 pounds

This area can be used to customize with your logo.
Checking harness fit  
Look for a harness that can be set up to fit a small body. Take a tape measure when you shop, and check the:

• **Shoulder harness:** Put the straps in the lowest position. They must go through the car seat at or below baby’s shoulders. If they do not, try a different car seat. For most newborns, the lowest position should be less than 8 inches up from the bottom cushion. For tiny babies, look for one as low as 5 or 6 inches.

• **Buckle strap:** Look for one that is less than 5 inches forward of the back cushion. Many straps can be adjusted.

**Correct car seat use**

- Limit time baby spends traveling.
- Do not use the car seat in the home.
- Dress your baby in clothes with legs so the buckle strap fits between the legs. It is not safe for thick clothing or blankets to be under the straps. If using a blanket, put it over the straps.
- Don’t add padding under or behind your baby. It makes the harness too loose, so your baby could be thrown out in a crash. Do use the pads that come with your car seat. Remove them only when the instructions say you should.
- Put the shoulder straps in a position at baby’s shoulders or just below. If the lowest position goes through the car seat above the shoulders, use a different car seat.
- Put baby’s bottom all the way back in the car seat. Don’t let baby slouch.
- Place the harness on baby as shown in the instructions. Make it snug against all part of baby’s body. Test that you cannot pinch any slack in the straps (picture, right).
- Put the chest clip at armpit level. If it touches the neck of a tiny baby when placed there, move it down slightly.
- If baby needs more support, use small rolled blankets beside baby. Roll and tuck the blankets firmly so they do not cover the face or limit breathing. A rolled cloth between the legs may be needed to prevent slouching. (See picture on top of page 1.)
- Install baby’s car seat in the back seat of the car. Use the center seat if you can get a good fit there.
- Install the car seat tightly. It should not move more than an inch when pushed near the belt. ALWAYS follow car seat instructions and the car manual.

**Dangers of Front Air Bags**

An opening air bag can kill a baby who is in a rear-facing car seat or on someone’s lap.

**Baby’s car seat must face the rear and should be in the back seat.** But, if baby does ride in front, the air bag MUST be off. Look for an on-off switch or an air bag light on the dashboard.

Learn about the air bags in your car. They protect most riders, but can be a danger to babies. Check the car’s owner’s manual and warning labels (such as on the car’s visors).