

This Is the Way Baby Rides

Prepare to Ride Safely With Your New Baby

Child
Safety
Facts
2026

Car seat basics

- Your baby is safest riding in a rear-facing car safety seat (car seat) as long as possible. Being rear facing protects baby's head and neck in a car crash. Stay rear facing as long as baby fits the car seat's height and weight limits. Also, know and follow your state's law.
- Babies always ride in the back seat; it is much safer than the front. Use the center rear seat if the car seat fits there. If baby *must* ride in the front seat, be sure the air bag is *off*. (See page 2.)
- Be sure the seat belt or LATCH holds the car seat tightly.
- Buckle and tighten the harness snugly over your baby's body.
- ALWAYS follow the car and car seat instructions to install and use the car seat correctly.

Pack for baby's first ride:

- ✓ Car seat
- ✓ Instructions for car seat and car
- ✓ Small baby clothes, with legs
- ✓ Small blankets, in case you need them to pad around baby (but never under the harness)

Warning: Car Seats Are Not Cribs!

Being in a car seat for long periods of time is not healthy for babies. Outside the car, baby should spend little time in a car seat. Always keep the harness buckled whenever baby is in the car seat.

Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride



Choosing a car seat for a new baby

What is the best car seat?

The "best car seat" is one that fits your child *and* your car. For a baby, it must face the rear of the car. Read all instructions and try the car seat out before buying it. Make sure it is easy for you to use. Be sure you can install it properly in all the cars you will use.

What kinds of car seats fit a new baby?

Use a car seat that fits your baby's length, weight, and health. Types include:

- **Rear-facing-only car seats (1):** These are small, have a handle, and fit most newborn babies well. Babies who have become too big for this type of car seat can keep riding rear facing by moving to a convertible car seat.
- **Convertible car seats (2):** These face the rear for babies and toddlers. Later, they can be changed to face forward. They fit older babies and toddlers, and many also fit new babies well. (See page two for how the harness must fit.)
- **Car beds (3):** Use a car bed (not shown) only if a doctor says your baby must ride lying flat for a health reason.

What features should I look for?

Consider your car's features and the needs of other riders. The car seat must fit the space in your vehicle. Be sure the car seat straps will fit a new baby and that you can adjust them to fit as baby grows. These safety basics are more important than fancy features.

How else can I plan for baby?

- Go to a car seat safety class. Check with your hospital or clinic to find one.
- Practice installing the car seat and adjusting the straps. Learn more from someone trained to help with car seats. (See *Resources*.)
- If your car seat has a base, leave the base installed in the car, ready for use, while at the hospital or birth center.

Resources

National Vehicle Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, 888-275-9171 (tty), www.NHTSA.gov

Car Recalls: Enter the car's VIN or license plate number at www.NHTSA.gov/recalls.

Find someone to help: www.NHTSA.gov/carseat (select Inspection under Installation Help) or www.safekids.org/find-a-tech

Find your state's car seat law: Search "child law" at www.iihs.org.

Online Training: Free, one-hour "Car Seat Basics" training; go to www.carseateducation.org

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org



1) Rear-facing-only car seats fit babies up to 22 to 35 pounds. (Check labels.)



2) Convertible car seats face the rear for children up to 30 to 50 pounds. (Check labels.)

Install baby's car seat rear facing

1. Always read instructions that come with the car seat.

Also, in your car manual, read the sections on seat belts, LATCH, air bags, car seats, and child safety.

2. Place the car seat in the back seat, facing the rear window.

The back seat is safer for baby than the front seat in all cars, especially cars with front air bags.

3. Use the seat belt or LATCH belt to install the car seat.

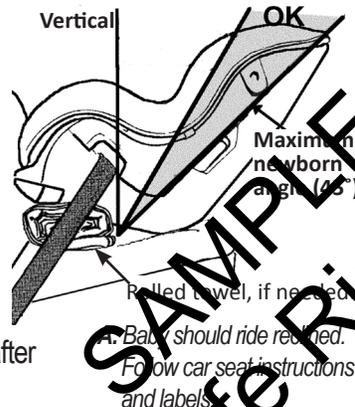
Do not use both at the same time unless both instructions say it is okay.

4. Make it tight.

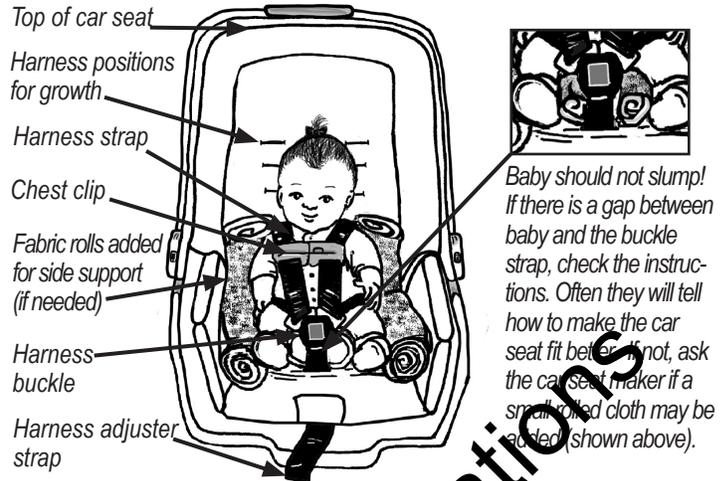
If the car seat is not installed tightly, your child could be seriously hurt in a crash. To check for a tight fit, grab the car seat near where the LATCH belt or seat belt goes through the car seat. Pull forward and side to side. The car seat should not move more than 1 inch. (Do not grab near the top of the car seat to check for tightness. The movement there is okay.)

5. Check the recline.

The car seat must recline enough, but not too much. Follow instructions for how to check. If too upright, baby's head might fall forward, making it hard to breathe. If this happens, follow instructions to make the car seat more reclined. If the car seat is still too upright, see if a firmly rolled towel or foam roll may be placed under the car seat to help (A). (Most car seats must be tightened again after making these changes.)



Get to know baby's car seat



Bring baby home safely

- **Check the instructions to be sure the car seat is set up for baby.** Put the shoulder straps in a low position, at or below baby's shoulders. Check for all ways that car seat parts, like straps and padding, can be set up to fit a small baby.
- **Dress baby in clothes with legs,** so the buckle strap can go between the legs. Avoid thick or oversized clothing.
- **Use any support pad or insert** that came with your car seat, following instructions. Do not put other padding, like a blanket or add-on cushion, under or behind baby.
- **Adjust the harness straps to fit snugly.** You should not be able to pinch any slack (C). Do not use thick blankets or dress baby in heavy clothes. If you do, the harness might not protect baby in a crash. In cold weather, buckle the harness *first* and put a blanket *over* baby.



- **Put the chest clip at armpit level.**
- **NEVER** take baby out of the car seat while the car is moving. If baby needs to come out, park in a safe place first.

Keep your growing baby safe

Keep baby rear facing as long as possible, per instructions. This is the best way to protect a child's head and spine.

Follow instructions to make a rear-facing car seat fit as baby grows. Move the harness straps up when baby's shoulders are as high as the next position. A car seat may be used rear facing until:

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

NEVER face baby forward until baby's size and age meet the minimums allowed by a forward-facing car seat's instructions. Many state laws say baby *must* stay rear facing until age 2.

Air Bag Danger: Put Baby in Back!

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

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

Learn about your car's air bags in the owner's manual. Also, read the air bag warning labels in your car.

