

# Car Safety for Growing Babies and Toddlers From 4 to 24 months

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013

## Babies are safest in the back seat in their rear-facing car seats!

### Car Seat Basics

- The rear-facing position protects baby's spinal cord in a crash.
- Use a rear-facing car safety seat (car seat) as long as possible—likely to 24 months or longer if the child still fits the car seat size limits. Convertible car seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 45 pounds.
- **NEVER** turn your baby to face forward before his first birthday. For a premature baby, this means waiting until at least one year after the original due date. Longer is better.
- Place your baby in the back seat. The back seat is safer for all children. The center back seat is safest if the car seat can be installed properly there.
- **ALWAYS** read and follow the instructions for the car seat and the car.

### Danger: Air Bags

A baby riding in the front seat of a car with an air bag is in great danger. The air bag could kill a baby if it hits the back of the car seat.

**Never put a rear-facing car seat in front with an active air bag.** Check the owner's manual for more information about your car's air bags.

**A sports car or pickup truck** with no back seat or a very small back seat may have a switch or sensor that turns off the front air bag. Make sure the **air bag is turned off** before putting a child in front. (Turn it on again for adult passengers.)

### Riding Rear Facing

**Rear facing** means that the baby is looking toward the back window of the car when riding in the car seat.

#### Why should my baby ride rear facing?

The back of a rear-facing car seat supports a baby or toddler's large head and weak neck in a crash. This lowers the chance of serious injuries. **Rear-facing child seats** should be used as long as possible. This is much safer than riding forward facing for a baby or toddler.

#### When should I move my baby from a small infant car seat?

The car seat must fit the baby's weight and height. Some babies may outgrow a rear-facing-only car seat (the type with a handle) by 6 to 9 months, because they are too heavy or too tall. Baby is too heavy for the rear-facing-only car seat if his weight is over the top weight limit. Baby is too tall when the top of his head is closer than one inch from the top of the car seat shell. Check the car seat's label and manual.

Move baby to a convertible seat when he is done using the rear-facing-only seat. Use the convertible seat rear facing. See page 2 to learn about convertible car seats.

#### I have a convertible seat. How long can I use it rear facing?

New convertible seats can safely hold a child up to 30 to 45 pounds in the rear-facing position. Also, the child's head must be at least an inch below the top of the car seat. (Check the limits on the seat label or instructions.)



*A toddler should ride facing the rear until she reaches the maximum rear-facing weight limit or is too tall for her convertible car seat.*



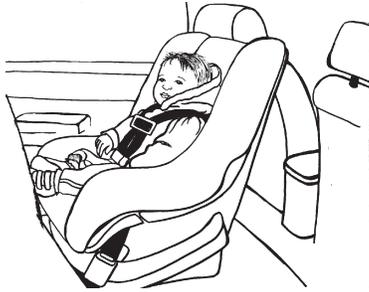
*A rear-facing child can be killed by the impact of an opening air bag.*

#### Is riding rear facing safe for a baby who is growing taller?

Yes. A baby or toddler can ride rear facing until his head gets to one inch below the top of the convertible car seat. It is okay for the legs to touch the seatback and bend. Long legs are not in danger in this position. In fact, legs are safer when rear facing.



## Choosing a Car Seat for a Bigger Baby



Convertible seats can be used facing the rear up to 30 to 45 pounds. Then use them facing forward.

The “best car seat” is one that fits your baby, fits into your car securely, and is one you will use correctly every time.

**A convertible car seat is bigger than a rear-facing-only car seat.**

Choose one with a rear-facing upper weight limit of 30 to 45 pounds. Use it rear facing up to its maximum weight or

height, if possible. Turn it to face forward when the child reaches the rear-facing upper limit for height or weight.

**Is your baby tall for his age?** Look for a convertible seat with high shoulder strap slots, so it will fit for a long time. (Take a measuring tape to the store!)

**Is your baby heavy for his age?** Look for a convertible that can be used rear and forward facing with its harness to a high weight. Some can be used up to 65 to 90 pounds forward facing, unless the child gets too tall.

**Choose a car seat with a harness that is easy for you to adjust.** Car seats with a harness that adjusts with a pull strap in the front are usually easier to use.

**Try a car seat in the back seat of your car** before you buy it. Make sure it fits and can be tightly installed. Try the seat in both rear-facing and forward-facing positions.

### Warning: Forward-facing Car Seats

Some seats are used **only** facing forward. Forward-facing-only car seats are only for children over age 1. Some labels say that a baby as small as 22 pounds can use these car seats, but it is always better to keep children this size facing the rear. Do not use a forward-facing seat until the child can no longer fit a rear-facing one.



## Check a second-hand car seat carefully

A used car seat may have hidden safety problems. Most newer car seats are easier to use and have better safety features.

- Make sure any recalls have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions.
- If the seat has been in a crash, it should **not** be used.
- Don't use a car seat that is expired—usually when 6 years old. Many car seats are marked with an expiration date.

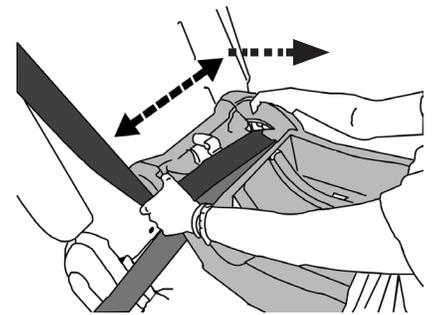
## Installing a Car Seat

It is very important that the car seat is tightly secured in the car. If it is too loose, your child could be seriously injured in a crash.

**Use the seat belt or LATCH straps to attach the car seat tightly.** Always read the instructions that come with the car seat. Also read the sections on seat belts, LATCH, air bags, and car seats in your car manual.

Choose **LATCH or the seat belt.** Use whichever gives the tightest fit. Do NOT use both at the same time, unless the instructions say it is okay. (Most do not.)

**To check for a tight fit,** hold the car seat where the LATCH straps or seat belt go through the car seat. Pull forward and from side to side. The car seat should not move more than one inch. (Do not grab near the top of a rear-facing car seat to check for tightness. Movement there is okay.)

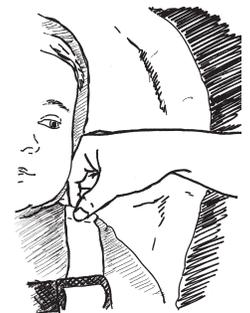


## Buckle Your Baby in Snugly

**Put the harness straps in the slots** at or just below your baby's shoulders when rear facing. Put them at or above when forward facing.

**Adjust the harness** to be snug so you cannot pinch the strap between your fingers (picture, right). It should lie flat and be equally snug over all parts of baby's body.

**Avoid dressing** your baby in thick clothing. That can make it impossible to get the harness snug enough. Tighten the straps first. In cold weather, put a blanket **over**, not under, the straps.



Use the pinch test. If you can pinch the strap, it is not snug enough.

## Resources

**National Auto Safety Hotline:** check recalls at 888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. Helpline:** 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)

**Find a Child Passenger Safety Inspection Location:** 866-732-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

### Other useful websites:

**American Academy of Pediatrics:** [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

**The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia:** [www.chop.edu/carseat](http://www.chop.edu/carseat)