



How to buy an infant car seat

Your baby will outgrow an infant car seat at 22 to 35 pounds or 29 to 32 inches tall, depending on the seat.

Infant car seats snap in and out of the car or stroller without disturbing your sleeping baby.

Look for the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration rating. The more stars a car seat has, the easier it is to install and secure your child in it.

what to look for when buying

Comfort: A well-padded seat with plenty of head support gives your baby a better ride.

Side-impact protection: Some car seats have special energy-absorbing foam and other features for better protection in a side-impact accident.

Easy adjustments: Avoid seats that make it hard to adjust the straps and harness as your baby grows. Better car seats let you adjust these from the front.

LATCH (lower anchors and tethers for children): The LATCH system lets you attach a car seat or base without using the seat belt. This can make installation easier. Infant car seats are required to have the lower anchors only.

A car seat base: Most infant car seats come with a base. Install the base in your car and simply snap the car seat in and out. You can buy extra bases for other vehicles.

what to avoid

Secondhand car seats: Don't use one unless it's less than five years old, was never in an accident, and comes with parts and instructions.

Incorrect installation: Have your seat installation checked by a professional. Visit www.nhtsa.gov for locations.

Car seat toys and mirrors: In an accident, these can become flying projectiles.

what it's going to cost you

Infant car seats range in price from

\$60 to \$250+.



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BabyCenter FAQ: buying a car seat

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Q: Do I have to have a car seat?

A: Yes. All 50 states and the District of Columbia require child safety seats – typically until your child is at least 7 years old.

Resource: <http://www.babycenter.com/car-seat>

Q: What kind of car seat do I need?

A: For newborns, experts recommend an infant car seat (described below). Most newborns do fit in what's called a convertible car seat, but experts agree that babies under 20 pounds fare better in the more securely fitting infant car seats.

Infant car seats have the added benefit of transferring smoothly from car to stroller, or from your car to inside your destination (this means you don't have to wake up your sleeping baby).

If you have a baby or toddler who weighs more than 35 pounds or is taller than 35 inches, you should look at convertible seats. Many models hold a child of up to 40 pounds rear-facing and up to 70 pounds forward-facing.

If your child is at least 4 and weighs at least 40 pounds, you can also switch to a booster seat (or belt-positioning booster).

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-how-to-choose-and-use-a-car-seat_399.bc

Q: Can I use a hand-me-down seat?

A: It's not recommended. Not only are used seats unlikely to come with the manufacturer's instructions (vital for correct installation), but they could be missing important parts, have been involved in an accident (even unseen damage can affect the seat's functioning), fall short of current safety standards, or have been recalled due to faulty design. Plus, plastic gets brittle as it gets older, so a seat that's too old could break in a crash.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-the-biggest-mistakes-parents-make-and-how-to_64875.bc

Q: What is an infant car seat?

A: Also called baby car seats, infant-only car seats always face the rear of the car. They have a weight limit of between 22 and 35 pounds. When your baby reaches the weight or height limits for his infant seat, move him to a rear-facing convertible car seat.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-how-to-choose-and-use-a-car-seat_399.bc

Q: What is a convertible seat?

A: Also called an infant-toddler car seat, convertible car seats function as both rear-facing seats for babies and toddlers and forward-facing seats for older children. Many new ones are designed to hold a child of up to 40 pounds rear-facing and up to 70 pounds forward-facing. If your child has outgrown a convertible car seat, it's time to move to a booster seat. These seats are for children 4 and older and who weigh at least 40 pounds.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-how-to-choose-and-use-a-car-seat_399.bc

Q: What is a booster seat?

A: Booster (or belt-positioning booster) seats are for kids who are at least 4 and weigh at least 40 pounds. A booster seat uses the car's lap and shoulder belts to secure the child. Backless boosters are fine when used with an automobile seat that provides head support.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-how-to-choose-and-use-a-car-seat_399.bc

Q: Can I get just one seat that will last until my baby is in preschool?

A: Although most newborns fit in a convertible car seat, experts agree that babies under 20 pounds fare better in the more securely fitting infant car seats.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-how-to-choose-and-use-a-car-seat_399.bc

Q: Are the cheaper car seats less safe?

A: Not necessarily. All car seats sold in the United States – expensive or not – must meet the same federal safety standards. More expensive seats may offer more features, but all seats provide the same level of basic protection.

Q: Are car seats crash tested?

A: All car seats sold in the United States must meet federal child restraint safety standards set by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. Manufacturers must provide proof that a seat meets the established requirements, but there is no federal crash test program for car seats yet.



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Q: Why should the car seat face the rear of my car?

A: Having the car seat face the rear lessens the negative impacts of the most common types of car crashes. It's so safe that the latest guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) say to keep your child in a rear-facing car seat until the age of 2, or until the child reaches the seat's maximum rear-facing height and weight limits.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_how-long-should-i-keep-my-child-in-a-rear-facing-car-seat_10348811.bc

Q: What is LATCH?

A: LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. This system is designed to help make it easier to properly install your car seat. The lower anchors are those small metal bars found in many vehicles' back seats. Adjustable lower straps (sometimes called LATCH straps) connect the car seat to the lower anchors. All car seats should use the top tether strap in the forward-facing position. Some manufacturers recommend using the top tether strap with a rear-facing seat as well.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_installing-a-car-seat_9458.bc

Q: Is installing a car seat easy? How do I know the seat's installed right?

A: Installing a car seat – whether infant, convertible, or booster – takes care and attention. The National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that 75 percent of car seats are improperly installed. After reading your seat's manual and installing your seat, it's highly recommended that you have the installation checked over at a car seat inspection station located near you. You could also sign up for a car seat installation workshop. They're short – usually about half an hour – and the peace of mind that comes with a properly installed seat is well worth the time. The NHTSA lists inspection stations on its website: <http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm>.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_installing-a-car-seat_9458.bc

Q: What's the safest place for my baby to be in the car?

A: The safest place for anyone (including adults!) is the middle of the back seat, or the center seat in a van or station wagon. If that spot is taken (and in general), kids 12 and under should sit somewhere in the back seat, using the appropriate child or booster seat or safety belt for their age and size.

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-air-bags_396.bc

Q: What if I have to put a child in the front seat?

A: If you're forced to seat a child up front because the car is full or it lacks a back seat (a pickup truck, for instance), slide the seat as far back as possible before installing the appropriate child safety seat or booster. If the air bag has an on-off switch, set it to off. If you can't turn the air bag off, under no circumstances place a rear-facing infant car seat in that spot.

If you don't have an air bag on-off switch and regularly need to put a child in the front seat, consider getting a switch installed. You can find out how from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Resource: http://www.babycenter.com/0_car-seat-safety-air-bags_396.bc

Q: What's a five-point harness?

A: It's a harness that comes over each shoulder, across both hips, and has one strap between the legs. All five parts of the harness come together at a common buckle. Five-point harnesses are considered the most protective type of harness. (Race-car drivers are buckled into their cars with five-point harnesses.)

Q: What do they mean by "system compatibility" when they're talking about car seats?

A: This typically refers to the ability of a car seat to be used in multiple stroller systems. For a few years, stroller manufacturers only made adapters for certain brands. But lately, universal car seat mounts or adapters are the norm.

Q: What's "re-thread" mean?

A: While new car seat designs are increasingly making this a thing of the past, to re-thread is to take apart the five-point harness in order to adjust the seat to your growing baby. With certain seat models, you are required to take the cover off, remove the belt attachment plates from the belts, pull the belts out of the seat, and then re-thread the belts to get the proper fit for your child.



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