

# Safety Centre

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# A Safe Family Car Trip

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## **A Safe Family Car Trip**

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## 1. Travelling with a new-born

Planning a car trip with your new-born can be daunting for a new parent. Unless it's absolutely necessary it's probably better to avoid a lengthy journey for a month or two.

If you do need to travel with your new-born, then these tips will help make the journey run as smoothly as possible:

**Travel at night:** If you're lucky and your baby is sleeping solidly for a few hours each night, then consider travelling during their normal bedtime as you may make it to your destination with fewer stops.

**Travel with a companion:** It's not advisable to travel by yourself, as mums with a new-born tend to be exhausted from the sleepless nights. Have your travel companion drive and sit in the back with your little one. Being nearer to your baby will allow you to tend to any needs or discomfort (such as feeding them or changing a nappy).

**Stop regularly:** If you have to travel during the day it's important that you factor in frequent stops. When travelling with a new-born you should make stops at least once every one and a half to two hours, preferably every hour. New-borns are not meant to be kept in their car seat for long periods so at scheduled stops, take your baby out of the car seat, change their nappy and feed them. If possible, consider putting them in a stroller and taking them for a walk. This will help them sleep better and keep you alert.

**Break up long journeys:** If your journey will take six hours or more, then it's a good idea to consider making the trip over two days and booking in somewhere overnight.

## 2. Safety first

Before you set out on a journey, regardless of how long or short it might be, it's important that you take the time to ensure that your child's car safety seat is securely fitted.

To check that it's properly fitted, push your weight into the car seat while tightening the seat belt. If correctly fitted it should have no slack.

Before setting off on long journeys you should also ensure that the harness is securely fitted. Depending on what clothing your child is wearing the security of the harness can differ from journey to journey. The harness should be quite tight; only one or two fingers should fit between the harness and your child's chest.

It's also important that before going on a car journey you pack plenty of water, a first-aid kit, and a flashlight in case your car should break down at night. It's also a good idea to call your insurance company to make sure that your road assistance plan is up to date. Charge your phone before you leave and bring along a phone charger that is suitable to use in the car in case of emergency.

It's vital that the night before you are setting out you ensure you get a good night's sleep. It's unsafe to drive if you're over-tired or sleep deprived. This makes you more prone to making mistakes, becoming drowsy or falling asleep at the wheel.

If you do feel over-tired while driving, follow these guidelines:

- Stop for a break every two hours: Pull over (not on the hard shoulder), get out of your car and go for a walk;
- If possible share the driving with your partner;
- Drink lots of water, coffee may help but it's only a short-term solution;
- Eat small snacks but avoid having a big meal.

If you're concerned that you're too tired to drive before your trip, then don't risk it. Take a nap first and only drive when you feel up to it.

### **3. What to pack for a car trip**

Whether you're packing for a long trip abroad or planning a short two hour drive, it's important that you plan in advance what you'll need to take with you. A well organised trip means a less stressful one for parents, so before you set off check these items off your list of things to do:

- Up to one week before the trip, wash all clothes that you think your child will need, based on the duration of your trip.
- Lay out an outfit for each day, (include an extra outfit or two for emergencies) and roll the clothes neatly. If you're feeling extra organised, you can put each outfit into labelled bags.
- Set out the clothes that your child will need for travelling the night before the trip so you don't have to rummage through suitcases.
- What you pack first in the boot, should be what you need to use last. If you don't plan on using sports equipment until after you arrive at your destination, then you should pack this first.
- Pack a bag with essential items such as nappies, coats, bibs and a change of clothes separately. This bag should go under the seat or be put into the boot last. Other items such as snacks for the journey and games to keep the kids occupied should be kept under the passenger seat.
- It's important that you don't pile things along the back window as drivers need to be able to see out without having a restricted view. Also, if the car has to brake suddenly, these items can become dislodged and may cause injury.

## 4. Food: Bring your own snacks

As every mum knows, you'll only be in the car five minutes when the kids will start complaining about being hungry. To combat this and to avoid having to spend lengthy periods of time in restaurants, pack healthy snacks that won't make a mess.

Some snacks that can easily be eaten in the car include:

- Rice cakes
- Bagels
- Sandwiches
- Apple slices
- Bananas
- Granola bars
- Trail mix
- String cheese

Some items that you might want to avoid include messy fruits like oranges or nectarines, yoghurts and cartons of juice as they tend to get spilled.

If you have a long journey in front of you, kids and in particular younger kids, tend to get tired so it's also a good idea to stop when they are hungry at a rest stop or picnic area so they can enjoy some fresh air and exercise.

If the weather is bad, shopping centres are good places to stop to take a break.

## 5. How to entertain kids during car trips

### (i) Travelling with a baby

If your baby is in a rear-facing car seat then keep them entertained with an activity mat or dangling toys. At this age your baby won't be able to see much out of the window so it's easy to see why they get bored and fussy.

Certain travel friendly toys are designed to attach to the car seat while others can be hung on the back of the seat facing your baby. Anything that they can hold, that is bright and eye-catching will keep them happy for a while at least.

If you find this isn't working and there's another adult in the car, get them to read aloud from a picture book. If you're driving alone, consider playing an audio book or a CD of nursery rhymes.

### (ii) Travelling with a toddler

When travelling with a toddler, audio books and CDs are great ways to keep them entertained. Fairy tales and other familiar stories are your best bet for keeping toddlers' attention. Songs and singing games are also great but as the driver you should never allow yourself to be distracted.

Other activities that will keep toddlers entertained include magnetic storyboards and other simple toys that don't involve lots of parts and pieces.

### **(iii) Travelling with older kids**

For children over three years of age, they'll be able to follow more intricate story plot lines, so audio books tend to be a terrific way of passing the time on the road. You can listen to classic books together such as the Harry Potter series or books by Roald Dahl. You can all enjoy them together or kids can listen to them on their own individual mp3 players while you enjoy your own more sophisticated audio-book or radio programme.

Another great idea is if your car has a DVD player or if you've access to a portable DVD player, then bring along some of their favourite movies and enjoy some rare peace and quiet on your trip!

Travel editions of board games are also a fun way to keep kids entertained as are handheld games consoles.

If all else fails a good old fashioned game of I-Spy is hard to beat!

## **6. How to prevent back-seat meltdowns**

Many parents dread taking their kids on long road trips because they can sometimes be spent trying to calm down a baby or breaking up back-seat fights between siblings. If you're already breaking out in a cold sweat at the thoughts of taking a family car trip, then try a few of these tips:

- If there is another adult travelling while you've a baby on board, it'll help if someone sits next to them. This works for toddlers too, they can read a book or play games together.
- When it comes to keeping older children from misbehaving, then the best line of defence is to ensure they're well fed, well rested and have plenty of toys, games and books to keep them from becoming restless.
- Putting pillows between kids can also give them their own space so they're less likely to become agitated.
- If a fight does break out, distraction is the best way to resolve it. Turn the radio up or organise a car game.
- The most important thing to remember is if you're finding it tough, pull over (in a safe area), take a break and wait until everyone has calmed down.

## **7. Travelling while pregnant**

It's common to feel tired and dizzy during pregnancy, which is why if you're planning a long car journey, it's important to drink regularly, eat healthy energy-providing foods (such as fruit and nuts) and remember to stop for regular breaks.

Keep air circulating in the car by either having the window open or the air conditioning turned on.

It is also important to keep your blood flowing. Get out of the car every couple of hours and go for a little walk. You can rotate your ankle and foot regularly while sitting in the car to ensure circulation is increased while you're stationary.



Remember it is the law to wear a seatbelt even while pregnant. The seatbelt should be worn with the cross straps resting between your breasts and the lap strap across your pelvis. Make sure this sits under your bump and never across it.

If at all possible, you should get someone else to drive. As your pregnancy progresses, your bump gets closer and closer to the steering wheel. If you're in a position where you have to drive, move your seat back as far as you comfortably can and tilt the seat slightly away from the steering wheel. Avoid leaning forward and ensure you sit fully back in the car seat.

## **8. How to avoid your child getting car sick**

Motion sickness is most common in children aged between 2 and 12 but it can happen at any age. If your child suffers from motion sickness, there are things you can do to alleviate the symptoms and the good news is it usually gets better as your child gets older. These tried and tested tips should help minimise the risk of car sickness:

- Schedule car trips where possible during your child's naptime.
- Don't seat your child too far back in the car as they are less likely to feel nauseated if they sit in the middle of the car.
- Be alert to the early signs of motion sickness, queasiness, a cold sweat, fatigue, and loss of appetite will generally occur before your child starts vomiting. Once you notice the signs, pull in off the road for a short break. Have them lie down and place a damp cloth on their forehead. The symptoms will usually pass within 10-15 minutes.
- While driving, having your child focus on a spot on the horizon can also help.
- Providing some cool air can help, open the window or turn on the air conditioning.
- Provide a distraction. Motion sickness can sometimes be a state of mind so try and get their mind off it by singing or chatting together. Play a game like I-Spy which will focus their attention outside the car. Books or puzzles are to be avoided as they will only increase the feeling of motion sickness.
- Give your child a light snack before the trip.
- If your child does vomit, make sure that you give them plenty of liquids afterwards to avoid dehydration.

## 9. Car travel checklist

In order to make sure you're as prepared as you can possibly be, follow this travel checklist for a calm car journey.

### For your baby

- Fully stocked nappy bag
- Baby blanket
- Change of clothes
- Baby bottles
- Bottle warmer
- Baby food, snacks and drinks
- Sippy cups
- Portable potty and tissue paper
- Bag of books and toys
- Car seat pillow
- Sun screen shades
- Baby carrier
- Baby wipes

### General

- Drinks and snacks for the adults
- Empty plastic bags for rubbish
- First aid kit/medication/prescriptions
- Mobile phone/car charger
- Jumper cables
- Money/wallet/drivers licence
- Sat-Nav system
- Suitcases

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