

Safety Centre

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Child Car Safety

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1. What types of car restraints are available?

From the moment you drive them home from the hospital right through until they are about 11 or 12 years of age, your child needs to be fitted with an appropriate restraint while travelling in a car.

A correctly fitted child car seat will keep the child securely in their seat and prevent them from being thrown about inside or ejected from the vehicle in the event of a car collision. A child restraint will also absorb some of the impact of the force meaning that your child is much less likely to be injured or killed in a crash.

When setting out to buy a car seat it's important that you choose one that:

- Conforms to the United Nation standard, ECE Regulation 44-03 or later version of the standard, 44.04.
- Is appropriate for the child's weight and height.
- Is fitted correctly and conforms to the manufacturer's instructions.

Depending on what your child weighs, there are different categories for child restraints. The age of your child will roughly correlate with what category your child fits into but it is **your child's weight that is the most important factor** in determining what type of child restraint to use.

The type of car seat your baby will need will fall into one of the following stages:

Group 0	Rearward facing baby seat
	For babies up to 10kg (22lbs) birth to 6-9 months
Group 0+	Rearward facing baby seat for babies up to 13kg/ 29 lbs
	Birth to 12-15 months
Group 1	Forward facing child seat
	9-18 kg 20-40 lbs
	9 months to 4 years
Group 2	Booster seat 15-25 kgs (33-55 lbs)
	4 to 6 years
Group 3	Booster cushion 22-36 kgs (48-79 lbs)
	6-11/12 years

Rearward facing baby seat:

A rearward-facing seat provides the best protection for your baby's head, neck and spine. It is safer than a forward facing seat which is why it is advisable to keep your baby in a rearward-facing car seat until they outgrow it, only moving them to a forward-facing seat when the top of their head is higher than the back of the seat or they have outgrown the maximum weight restriction of the baby seat.

Rearward facing baby seats are suitable for babies from birth up until 6-9 months (Group 0) or who weigh up to 10 kgs (22lbs), or Group 0+ for babies roughly from birth to 12-15 months who weigh up to 13kg. They can be used in the front or the back seat of the car, although it is safer to seat them in the rear of the car and **they should never be placed in the front in a car with passenger air bags.**

Forward facing car seat

You should only move your child to a booster seat when they have outgrown the maximum weight for the child seat or their head is higher than the seat.

Forward facing car seats are suitable for children weighing 9-18kg or approximately between the ages of 9 months and 4 years.

Booster seat

Some booster seats have an inbuilt design which allows them to be converted into a booster cushion when your child is bigger by removing the back attachment.

Booster seats are suitable for children weighing 15 – 25kg or approximately between the ages of 4 and 6 years.

Booster cushion

Booster cushions do not have an inbuilt harness to hold the child in place; instead the adult safety belt is fastened around the child and the seat. It is vital therefore that the safety belt is correctly adjusted.

Booster cushions are suitable for children weighing 22-36kg and between the ages of 6 and 11/12 years.

Seatbelt

Seatbelts are designed for people who are at least 150cm (approx. 5ft) in height. It's important that you don't graduate your child to using a seat belt too early.

Most children are ready to use a seat belt by the time they are about 11 years old, although this will differ depending on the child.

It's also important to note that lap and diagonal seat belts (three-point) will provide greater protection than lap belts. The belt should be worn as tight as possible and the diagonal strap should rest just over the shoulder and not the neck.

However, it is better to use a lap belt than no belt at all. If using a lap belt, it should be placed over the pelvis and not the stomach and worn as tight as possible.

2. Buying a car child seat- checklist.

Is the child seat suitable for my child?	Check the packaging before purchasing to make sure the seat is suitable for your child's weight.
Will the car seat fit in my car?	Not all car seats fit all cars as the shape of the seats in cars, the length of seat belts and where the seat belt anchor points are positioned will differ between cars so before purchasing it's important to check that the car seat will fit correctly in your car.
How helpful/ knowledgeable is the retailer?	Ask friends and family to share their experiences of buying car seats and try to select a retailer with a reputation of being helpful and knowledgeable.
	See if the retailer will allow you to fit the car seat before purchasing or will demonstrate how it works.
	Find out if the retailer will allow you to return the car seat if it doesn't suit your needs.
Does the seat conform to the latest safety standard? (United Nation standard, ECE Regulation 44-03)	Look for the E mark.
Does the car have air bags?	If your car has an airbag in the front passenger seat then you must not use the rearward facing seat in the front passenger.
	Ensure that the car seat will fit in the back seat.
Are the instructions easy to follow?	Ensure that the you can easily fit the car seat.

3. Tips for fitting car seats

Before fitting your child's car seat, it is important to be aware that a rear facing car seat is safer when fitted in the back seat of the car but if there is no room in the back seat then they can be fitted in the front passenger seat. They should **NEVER** be fitted in the front passenger seat if there is an airbag on the passenger side. If the airbag is deflated, the child seat would be struck with great force.

Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for fitting the seat. If you cannot understand the instructions or have lost your copy then contact the manufacturer.

When fitting the car seat, you need to ensure that the car seat is resting firmly on the seat of the car, with little or no room for movement to the front or back.

The seat belt should also pass through all the corresponding guides on the car seat.

Once fitted you should check that the seat buckle is not resting on the frame of the car seat.

To check that it is properly fitted, push your weight into the car seat while tightening the seat belt. If correctly fitted then there should be no slack.

Always keep the manual with the car seat and if you have any concerns about how the car seat is fitted then it's important that you speak to a professional.

If you are fitting a forward-facing car seat make sure that the car seat is positioned as far back as it will go as this reduces the chances of injury.

Never modify a car seat or car to make it fit.

4. How to use car seats

Always set a good example for your child by wearing your seatbelt, it's a lot easier to convince your child of the importance of car safety if they have your example to follow.

Your child should use a car seat for every journey without exception, regardless of how short the journey is or if it involves fitting the car seat in a different car.

Always take the time to strap in your child and ensure they are comfortably secured.

The harness should be correctly adjusted for your child. It should be quite tight; only one or two fingers should fit between the harness and your child's chest.

The security of the harness can differ from journey to journey depending on what clothing your child is wearing so it's important that you check it before setting out on each car trip.

It's also important that you never tuck the safety belt under the child's arm or behind their back.

5. Legislation for child safety seats

EU law states that all children must travel in a child seat, booster seat or booster cushion while in a car. It is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that all passengers are using seatbelts and where applicable constrained in an appropriate car seat, booster seat or booster cushion.

Ensuring a child is properly constrained in a child car set can reduce injuries by 90-95% for rear facing seats and 60% for forward facing seats.

For cars and goods vehicles including MPV AND SUVs:

- Children under 3 are only permitted to travel in cars or goods vehicles if they are fitted with the appropriate child restraint. The only exception to this rule is taxis.
- Children aged between 3 and 12 must use an appropriate child restraint in cars or goods vehicles that are fitted with safety belts. If the car or goods vehicle is not fitted with safety belts, they must sit in the back seat.
- Rear facing car seats must not be fitted in front passenger seats with an active airbag.

For buses:

- If **travelling on a bus**, children between 3 and 12 are required to use safety belts if available.
- If seatbelts are fitted, bus drivers are required by law to tell passengers it is the law to wear them.

What are the exceptions?

- Taxis, hackneys and limousines are not required to have every kind of child restraints available.
- A child aged 3 and over can be fitted with a seatbelt while travelling in a car or goods vehicle if there is no room for a child car seat, provided they are seated in the back seat.

- If it is not possible for your child to travel in the back seat of your vehicle, it is permitted for them to be seated in the front passenger seat providing they are securely fastened with the restraints appropriate for their weight class.

6. The do's and don'ts of child car safety

Do

- Use only an approved restraint that is appropriate for the child's weight and size.
- Use restraints which have been approved to the latest standard, (UNECE Regulation 44.04)-which are designed to fit in newer cars and have increased protection for your child.
- Check that the car seat fits the model of your car before purchasing. Ask the retailer to fit the seat before purchasing.
- Opt for a car seat that adheres to the ISOFIX system if your car is fitted with the required anchorage points; always check the vehicle handbook.
- Ensure that the car seat is fitted securely and always follow the instructions.
- Check the harness each time your child uses the seat to make sure the harness is comfortably fitted.
- Fit restraints in the back seat of the car where possible.
- Explain to your child about how important it is to remain firmly strapped in during every journey.

Don't

- Carry children without restraints, regardless of how short the journey.
- Fit a rear-facing car seat in the front seat of a car that has an active passenger airbag as this is extremely dangerous should the airbag deploy.
- Buy a used or second hand car seat, unless you know its history and it comes with a set of instructions.
- Buy a car seat without first checking that it is compatible with your car.
- Use a car seat that has been involved in a car crash.
- Allow a child to sit on your knee while travelling.

- Allow children to climb out of their belts or release seat belt buckles.
- Make any modifications to child seats or buckles as this could cause serious problems should an accident occur.
- Use a cushion in place of a booster cushion as it won't be secure.
- Leave your child unattended for any length of time in a car.

7. How to deal with problem behaviour while driving

It's very common for children to go through a difficult phase of not wanting to wear their child seat harness or safety belt. Children can try to slip out of the child harness or release the buckle during car trips which is a source of concern and frustration for parents.

So how do you stop your child from releasing the belt buckle once they have learned how to?

The following may help keep problem behaviour under control:

Make sure that your child understands the importance of wearing a seat belt, explain that it keeps them safe and they have to wear it at all times.

Show your child that you have to wear your seat belt too. Children are more likely to follow by example so it's important that they see you doing it too.

Do not start the engine until your child is buckled in securely. If your child refuses to fasten their harness then you should wait until they do so. If they remove their belt or harness during the journey, come to a safe stop and explain that the car won't move until they put their belt back on.

Children often unfasten seat belts or harnesses if they are restless or bored, provide them with books or toys to keep their little hands busy or have a sing-song together. It's important however that the driver never be distracted by these activities.

Whatever you find works for you, the most important thing is to be consistent.

Never give into your child and allow your child to travel without a safety belt securely fastened around them. It is a legal requirement and to do so would put your child at serious risk should an accident occur. It will also be harder to get your child to wear the restraint the next time you sit into the car.

8. Unattended children in vehicles

Infants or young children should never be left unattended in a motor vehicle even if it is just for a few minutes.

There are a number of dangers that can arise if a child is left alone even for a brief period including:

- Breathing difficulties on a warm day.
- A child could become trapped in electronically operated windows.
- Accidental outbreak of fire.
- Injury due to accidental movement of the vehicle.

It's important that you never leave the key in the ignition when the car is not in use.

9. Car safety when driving your child to school

All mums know how hectic getting the kids out the door and into school on time can be. However, when driving your kids to school, it's vital that you take every precaution to ensure their safety:

- Before starting the engine, your child should be secured in the back seat using a weight appropriate restraint.
- Always ensure to wear your seat belt as a good example for your child.
- Ensure your child cannot open doors or windows.
- Never leave a child alone in an unattended vehicle, even for a brief period.
- Set down your child on the same side of the road as the school if possible.
- Do not park anywhere that is prohibited by a traffic sign or roadway markings. Children should never cross the road between parked cars as they will be unable to see any approaching cars and drivers will not see the child.

10. Premature and low-birth weight babies

Recent research has suggested that premature and low-birth weight babies can be susceptible to breathing difficulties if they remain in a car seat for extended periods of time.

The research found that new born babies developed problems breathing after one hour in the baby seat.

If your baby was born prematurely or a low-birth weight, it's important that you:

- Speak to the hospital to assess whether it is safe for your baby to be fitted in a car seat.

- Try to keep car journeys to a minimum for the first few months of your baby's life.
- Recline the baby seat as far back as possible while in the car.
- Never leave your baby unattended in the seat. Try to have someone sitting beside the baby if possible.
- Only place your baby in the car seat for the duration of the car journey and don't use it for feeding or sleeping.

If you have any concerns, consult with your doctor

11. Safety belt advice while pregnant

During pregnancy it is still required by law to wear a safety belt, unless you have a medical reason to be exempt.

If you are pregnant, there are some steps you should follow to ensure your seat belt is safely positioned.

- The diagonal strap should be placed over the breastbone, while the strap should rest over the shoulder as opposed to the neck.
- The lap belt should rest flat on the thighs and over the pelvis. It should never be pulled across the bump.
- It is safer to wear the belt as tight as possible as in this way the force of a sudden impact can be absorbed by the body's frame.

Pregnant women are not advised to wear 'Lap-only-seat-belts' in place of lap and diagonal belts as they can cause serious injuries to an unborn child if the car breaks suddenly. Both mother and unborn baby are safest when wearing lap and diagonal seat belts correctly.

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