

Car Seat Safety for Premature & Small Babies

Everything you need to know to keep your kids safe in a motor vehicle.

Every baby deserves to be protected in case of a car crash. However small your baby is, a car safety seat or car bed is available to safely transport them when they leave the hospital. **No matter how small your child is they should NEVER ride in someone's arms.**

Before you leave the hospital, find out from the doctor if your baby has any special needs while riding in the car. Most small babies can ride in conventional car seats, but babies with breathing problems may require a car bed.

Picking a Seat

Use only a car seat that is not expired—usually less than 6 years old and that has not been involved in an accident.

- Your small baby will fit best in an infant-only car seat. Most infant-only car seats have a starting weight between 4 or 5 pounds.
- If a child does not meet the seat's minimum height or weight requirements, it cannot be used.
- Pick an infant car seat with a space of 5-1/2 inches or less between the crotch strap and the back of the seat. Additionally, car seats with multiple harness- strap slots may be more suitable for small but rapidly growing infants.
- Try before you buy. Check both the instruction booklet for the seat and the owner's manual for your vehicle. If you can grasp the seat at the belt path and scoot the seat forward or sideways more than 1 inch after belting it in, the seat is not in tight enough.
- Call the Texas Children's Car Seat Line at 832-822-2277 for help installing the safety seat



If your baby can ride in a safety seat

Most small babies will be able to ride safely in a conventional infant-only car seat. A child should remain in a seat that faces the back of the car until they are 2 years old.

After an infant exceeds the limits of their infant-only seat, they should transition into a convertible car seat and remain facing the back of the car until they exceed the rear facing height or weight max.

Never place a rear facing car seat in the front seat with an active air bag. Airbag deployment can be deadly.

- If your baby's breathing needs to be monitored, the best solution is to have a second adult riding in the back with them.



Supporting your baby in the seat

- When placing the child in the seat, their buttocks and back must lay flat against the back of the seat. Do not put padding under the baby's bottom.
- The shoulder straps must be in slots at or below your baby's shoulders. At first, use the lowest slots. The harness straps need to be snug to protect your baby.
- The harness retainer clip should be at armpit level.
- Do not wrap your baby in a blanket and then buckle him or her in. The correct way is to buckle your child in, then put the blanket over the baby.

- Premature babies may require extra support in an infant-only carrier. Rolled up receiving blankets or diapers can be used. Put them along the sides of the baby, as seen in the picture below. Padding between your baby's legs and the crotch strap may be necessary.



- It is very important that seat be at the manufacturers recommended recline angle, usually 45°. If the seat is too upright, the infant's head may slope forward. To check for the correct angle, seats will have a line or angle indicator. A tightly rolled beach towel or pool "noodle" placed under the seat may be needed to achieve the correct angle.

If your baby has special needs

If your baby has to lie flat, *travel as little as possible*. Have two adults in the car – one to drive and one to watch the baby.

- Use a special car bed
- Ask your doctor whether your baby should ride lying on his or her back or stomach.

If your baby has special equipment

Some babies have apnea monitors, portable oxygen tanks or other equipment. Use them when you travel. Secure equipment by wedging it and putting padding around it or using unoccupied, adjacent seat belt. Check owner's manual about placing items under the vehicle seat.

For a heart or breathing monitor, make sure it is completely charged and bring spare batteries.

In general:

- Minimize travel as much as possible
- Car seats should only be used for travel
- If a child has health issues that need to be monitored – have one adult to monitor and one adult to drive.
- Travel with medical care plan
- For long trips, have list of health care providers and durable medical equipment providers, if applicable.