



How Car Seats Save Children

If you have heard it once, you've probably heard it a thousand times: "No one wore car seats in my day, and we all turned out ok." But anecdote is not data. There are more cars on the road, driving at faster speeds for longer distances, than ever before. This makes the roads of today significantly more dangerous than those of just 20 years ago. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration points to a 67% reduction in the risk of serious injuries when parents put their children in well-fitted car seats.

Your child's body is not as durable as your own. Much of a baby's skeleton is made of soft cartilage that will eventually turn into bone. This makes her more vulnerable to injuries during a crash, particularly since her organs are not as well-protected as those of an adult. Some other factors that make car crashes particularly dangerous for children include:

- Developing brains and spinal cords; brain and spinal cord damage are more dangerous in children, whose brains and bodies are still developing.
- Children's smaller size, which makes it easier for even a relatively light bump to your car to send them flying.
- Children's lower self-control; an adult knows to sit still in his or her seat. But your child may squirm in his car seat or booster seat if he is not properly secured, making him more vulnerable if you get into a crash.

Rules for Car Seat Safety

If you want to do all you can to protect your child from death, serious injury, and trauma after a car crash, follow these simple tips:

- Keep your child in a rear-facing car seat until she is at least 24 months old, or until she exceeds the weight recommended by the seat manufacturer. Keeping your child rear-facing through age three offers even more safety benefits, so don't rush your little one to graduate to a forward-facing seat too quickly.
- Children should remain in a car seat with a harness until age seven.
- Children ages 8-12 will likely need booster seats to remain safe.
- Children should not sit in the front seat until they weigh more than 90 pounds.
- Children should not sit in any seat that has an air bag until they weigh more than 90 pounds, so ask your mechanic about deactivating any rear airbags you have.
- Put car seats in the back seat of the car. The center seat is statistically the safest location, but side seats are acceptable if you have multiple car seats or your middle seat does not have an appropriate buckle.
- The car seat base should be fully secure, and flush against the seat. If it rocks or moves, it is incorrectly installed. **Your local fire department can help you install the seat.** Some pediatricians also offer assistance with car seat installation.
- The straps should fit snugly against your child's body, with the buckle flush against your child's chest—not at his stomach or chin. If you can pinch the harness straps together, it's too loose.
- If the seat has two buckles, both must be buckled at all times.
- Your child should not be permitted to move the shoulder strap under her arm or unbuckle a portion of the car seat.

Check online regularly to see if your child's car seat has been recalled, and read car seat reviews before selecting a brand. Remember also that car seats expire six years from the date of manufacture, so a used car seat may be safe, but a car seat from three children ago likely won't be. Check the label on the car seat for an expiration date. If no such label is visible, don't use it.

<https://www.spinalcord.com/blog/the-importance-of-car-seat-safety-to-prevent-injuries>