

Car Seat Info Sheet

Car accidents are the leading cause of death and disability (including abdominal trauma, brain injury, spinal cord injury and paralysis) in children in the US. Properly using a car seat or child restraint system reduces fatal injury by 71% in infants and 54% in children. Illinois Law states that children under 8 yrs of age must be in a child restraint system each time they are in a motor vehicle. Children 40 lbs and under must use a 5 pt harness restraint system. The AAP recommends all children under 12 yrs of age travel in the back seat of the vehicle to prevent serious injury from the front passenger air bag and other possible injuries from front or side crashes. Car seat misuse has been reported as high as 80%. Typical errors are seat not installed tight enough, harness straps too loose, harness straps not routed correctly and chest clip placed too low. Always read the instructions carefully for your seat to make sure you are installing it correctly and using the harness correctly. There are many types of child restraint systems and parents need to know which one is appropriate for their child, and they also need to know how to properly use it. The LATCH system is standard in all vehicles manufactured after 2002 and makes installation of car seats easier, however, when installed properly, seat belt installation is also safe. Several websites are listed below that contain information on car seat recalls and where to get the installation checked for your car seat.

www.nhtsa.dot.gov - list of car seat recalls.

www.cpsc.gov - list of car seat recalls

www.preventinjury.org/specneeds.asp - info on child restraints for children with special needs

www.seatcheck.org - list of places where you can get your car seat installation checked

Key Points to Remember

- Use a car seat appropriate for your child's height and weight and age.
- Use a 5pt harness system until your child is at least 5yrs of age.
- Be sure to read instructions carefully for your car seat.
- Always make sure the harness straps, chest clip or seat belt are tightened and placed appropriately.
- The safest position for an infant or small child is the rear middle position of the vehicle.
- Never allow a child under the age of 12 years ride in the front seat.
- Never transport more passengers than your vehicle can safely accommodate.
- Never use a car seat that has been in an accident severe enough to cause injury to a passenger or air bag deployment.
- Never use a car seat that does not have a manual for you to follow.
- Check the expiration date on your car seat and do not use past that date.
- Be a good example and always wear your seat belt too!

Infants

Most infant car seats can be used for infants weighing from 4-5 lbs to 20-30lbs. They must be installed rear-facing in the back seat of the vehicle. Most have bases that can be left in the car and the seat will click in and out of the base. Infant car seats can also be clicked into strollers for ease of transfer. The shoulder harness needs to be at or below the infant's shoulders. The straps should be tight enough so that only 1 finger can be placed between the strap and the infant or child. Cloth diapers or burp clothes can be rolled alongside the infant or under the crotch strap for small infants to create a snug fit of the 5 pt harness. Strap covers sold for the shoulder straps should not be used as they prevent the chest clip from being placed in the proper position – at the armpit level. Infants should not be placed forward facing until they weigh at least 20 lbs AND are two years of age. Recent studies reported in 2011 led to the AAP to change their previous recommendations: **All children under the age of 2 years should be placed rear facing.** Severe injuries in car crashes are significantly reduced when infants and toddlers are placed rear facing.

Convertible Car seats

These seats are designed to fit infants up to children weighing 40-80 lbs depending on the manufacturer. They can be used rear-facing or forward facing and can be the only seat used from infancy through young childhood if the parents do not want to spend money on an infant-only seat. These seats all use a 5 pt harness system (the "T" shield system is rarely manufactured anymore and has been found to be less safe than a 5 pt system). The chest clip must still be placed at the armpit level and the shoulder harness should be at or above the child's shoulders when forward facing. The child should remain in the 5pt harness convertible seat until the tops of the child's ears are above the seat back and the child's shoulders become higher than the highest shoulder strap slot or the child reaches the weight limit for the seat (usually age 4-6 yrs). **Studies have shown that children suffer fewer injuries and fatalities during crashes when they are restrained in a 5pt harness convertible seat up to the age of 6 yrs.** For this reason it may be wise to invest in a seat with a higher weight limit in order to keep the child restrained safely as long as possible.

Combination Seats

These seats function as a forward facing 5pt harness convertible seat and can change to a belt positioning booster as the child grows. They have higher weight limits for 5 pt harness use than some convertible seats.

Booster Seats

There are two types of booster seats: high back and backless. The function of the high back booster is to provide more support in a car with a low seat back or no head rests. Many high back boosters convert to a backless booster. The purpose of the booster is to raise the child up higher in order for the lap-shoulder seat belt to fit properly. The lap belt should fit snug over the hips and the shoulder belt should fit across the child's chest without rubbing their neck. Booster seats should be used until the child fits properly in the seat belt without it. Recently the AAP released recommendations for all children to be in a booster seat until they are 4'9" tall and weigh at least 80 pounds.