



Car Safety

This handout was written to answer some of the questions most often asked about car safety. Feel free to ask your doctor or nurse practitioner to go over any information you do not understand.

Why should my child ride in a car safety seat or use a seat belt?

- **It is the safest place to be** - In your arms is the most dangerous place for your child to ride. Holding a child is called the “child crusher position.” If there is a crash, your child will be squeezed between you and the dashboard.

Car crashes are the leading cause of death for children from birth to age 21. More children die in car crashes than from any disease.

Injuries caused by car crashes can change a healthy active child to one with pain and handicaps. As many as 90 percent of injuries can be stopped with the use of proper car seats and seat belts. It has been shown that most children behave better in cars when they are in a car seat.

- **It is the law** - Ohio law states that any child weighing up to 40 pounds and is 4 years old or younger must ride in an approved car safety seat. Others must use a seat belt. The back seat of the car is safer than the front and is recommended for all children 12 and younger. Use booster seats for your child from age 4 and 40 pounds to age 8 and/or 80 pounds.

How do I use a car safety seat?

- Follow the instructions that come with your safety seat and vehicle’s owner’s manual.
- Be sure the car seat is in so tight that you cannot move it more than one inch from side to side and front to back (check this at the belt path)
- Make sure harness straps are so snug on the child that you cannot pinch any slack at the shoulders. The plastic retainer clip should be placed at armpit level at all times.
- Check our website at www.childrensdayton.org (see our community calendar) or call us at (937) 641-3666 to find a car seat check near you.

What seat works best?

Here are some general guidelines to help you select a car seat that best fits your child.

Infant-only car safety seats (from birth to 20 pounds)

Infant-only safety seats must face the rear of the car when installed. Usually the center of the back seat is the safest place for your child. If you use the front seat and your car has an airbag on the passenger side, a rear-facing infant needs to ride in the back. Seats made for infants only must face backward no matter what your child weighs.

Convertible safety seats (from birth to 40 pounds)

Convertible safety seats-those you can use for infants and toddlers-must face the rear of the car until the child weighs at least 20 pounds and is 1 year old. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends keeping infants rear-facing to the limits of the seat (some seat's weight limits go as high as 35 pounds). This position protects the child's back, neck and head, and is very important for young children. Make sure the seat belt is routed correctly. There is only one correct way if the seat faces the rear and one correct way if it faces forward, although the way the belt is routed varies depending on the brand of seat you buy.

Booster seats

These are used when a convertible or toddler safety seat is outgrown. Children need to be in a booster seat until they are about 80 pounds or 4'9" tall. Should your child be in booster seat?

Answer these questions:

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat?
3. Is the lap belt centered on the tops of the thighs?
4. Is the shoulder belt centered on the shoulder and chest?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to ride safely in the car. Riding in a booster is more comfortable too.

How do seat belts (or car safety seats) work in a crash?

A seat belt causes the force of the crash to be spread more evenly over the strongest parts of your child's body, protecting his or her head. A seat belt keeps your child from being thrown from the car for from becoming a "flying object" in the car. Children who are thrown from a car are much more likely to die or be injured more seriously. Even a quick stop can result in injury or death when an unbuckled child becomes a flying object.

Suggestions for keeping children happy in a car:

- Children who use car safety seats or seat belts are usually more comfortable. This makes them happier riding in a car and better behaved. (This means the driver is less distracted, so the ride is also safer).

- If your child cries or has a temper tantrum because he or she does not want to use his or her car seat, do not give in to this behavior. Firmly, but kindly, tell him or her you are using the seat belt or car safety seat for his or her safety and that he or she will stay there.
- Praise your child often for riding in the safety seat or wearing a seat belt.
- Always take your child with you when you leave your car, even if you will only be gone a few minutes.
- Set a good example. If you buckle up, your child will want to be safe too.

To make your trip happier:

- Sing songs together.
- Provide soft toys.
- Make up a bag of toys just for car rides. You will want to make changes from time to time. You may want to include your child's favorite stuffed toy.
- Play games based on what you see.
- Talk to each other (including young children).
- On long trips, schedule breaks. Stop for 10 minutes every hour or so, depending on your child

The information contained in this handout is for general information only and should not be considered complete. For specific information about car safety, please ask your child's doctor or nurse practitioner.

Additional information and resources are available in the Family Resource Center at Dayton Children's. The center is open Monday 9:00 am - 8:00 pm; Tuesday - Friday 9:00 am - 4:00 pm; Saturdays 9:00 am–2:00 pm. The Center is closed on Sundays and holidays. Please call 937-641-3700 for more information.

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