

BUYING THE RIGHT CAR SEAT

Sourced from the NHTSA & Safekids.org

Car Seat Types

Learn about the four types of car seats, while keeping in mind the following tips:

- As children grow, how they sit in your car will change. Make sure you use a [car seat that fits your child's current size and age](#).
- Not all car seats fit in all vehicles. Make sure the car seat is the [right fit for your vehicle](#). Test the car seat you plan to buy to make sure it fits well in your vehicle.
- Buy a car seat that can be installed and used correctly every time.

Rear-Facing Car Seat



The best seat for your young child to use. It has a harness and, in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.

Types

- **[Infant Car Seat \(Rear-Facing only\)](#)**: Designed for newborns and small babies, the infant-only car seat is a small, portable seat that can only be used rear-facing. Babies usually outgrow their infant car seats by 8 or 9 months. When that happens, we recommend that parents purchase a convertible or all-in-one car seat and use it rear-facing.
- **[Convertible Seat](#)**: As a child grows, this seat can change from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat with a harness and tether. Because it can be used with children of various sizes, it allows for children to stay in the rear-facing position longer.
- **[All-in-One Seat](#)**: This seat can change from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat (with a harness and tether) and to a booster seat as a child grows. Because it can be used with children of various sizes, it allows for children to stay in the rear-facing position longer.

Forward-Facing Car Seat



Has a harness and tether that limits your child's forward movement during a crash.

Types

- **[Convertible Seat](#)**: As a child grows, this seat can change from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat with a harness and tether.
- **[Combination Seat](#)**: As a child grows, this seat transitions from a forward-facing seat with a harness and tether into a booster.
- **[All-in-One Seat](#)**: This seat can change from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat (with a harness and tether) and to a booster seat as a child grows.

Booster Seat



Positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child's body.

Types

- **[Booster Seat With High Back](#)**: This type of booster seat is designed to boost the child's height so the seat belt fits properly. It also provides neck and head support and is ideal for vehicles that don't have head rests or high seat backs.
- **[Backless Booster Seat](#)**: A backless booster seat is designed to boost the child's height so the seat belt fits properly. It does not provide head and neck support. It is ideal for vehicles that have head rests.
- **[Combination Seat](#)**: As a child grows, this seat transitions from a forward-facing seat with a harness into a booster.
- **[All-in-One Seat](#)**: This seat can change from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat (with a harness and tether) and to a booster seat as a child grows.

Seat Belt



Should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain your child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck or face.

Car Seat Recommendations

There are many car seat choices on the market. Use the information below to help you choose the [type of car seat](#) that best meets your child's needs. [Select a car seat based on your child's age and size](#), then choose a seat that fits in your vehicle, and use it every time.

- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer's instructions (check height and weight limits) and read the vehicle owner's manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or lower anchors and a tether, if available.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer's height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.

Recommended car seats based on your child's age and size

Rear-Facing Car Seat



Birth-12 Months

Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats:

- Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing.
- Convertible and all-in-one car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.

1 – 3 Years

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether.

Forward-Facing Car Seat



1 – 3 Years

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether.

4 – 7 Years

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

Booster Seat



4 – 7 Years

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

8 – 12 Years

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.

Seat Belt



8 – 12 Years

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.

Read the Label

1. Before you buy, read the label. Look for the weight, height and age limits to make sure the car seat is right for your child.
2. Buying online? Find this information in the product description. Look for a section called “specification” or “specs.”
3. Check your car seat expiration date. You can find the expiration date on your car seat label or imprinted on the plastic. When you throw away an expired or unsafe car seat, take it apart and put the pieces in separate dark trash bags to prevent someone else from using an unsafe car seat.

Register Your Car Seat

Register your car seat. It allows the manufacturer to notify you if there is a safety recall. Don't worry, the information you provide cannot be used for marketing purposes.

Used Car Seats

Be wary of used car seats. Don't buy a used car seat unless you know the previous owner or the complete history of the car seat. A used car seat is unsafe if it has been in a crash or if it is missing parts, labels or instructions. A car seat is also unsafe if the manufacturer has issued a safety recall and seat has not been fixed. There's just no way to be sure that a used car seat from a stranger is safe.