



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ018

PREGNANCY

Car Safety for You and Your Baby

- **What are safety belts?**
- **What happens in a car crash?**
- **What do safety belts do?**
- **Can wearing a safety belt really prevent injury to my unborn baby?**
- **How should I wear a safety belt during pregnancy?**
- **Where are airbags located?**
- **How should I travel during pregnancy in a car with air bags?**
- **When should I get a safety seat for my baby?**
- **Where should an infant safety seat be installed?**
- **What types of safety seats are available for infants?**
- **What is a booster seat?**
- **What is LATCH?**
- **What should I be aware of when buying a safety seat?**
- **Where can I find more information about child safety seats?**

What are safety belts?

In most cars, the safety belt is one piece, made with a lap and shoulder belt. This is known as a three-point belt. One belt goes across your lap, and the other goes over your shoulder. In some cars, the lap and shoulder belts are separate; always wear both.

What happens in a car crash?

A car crash has two parts. The first is when the car hits something, or is hit, and comes to a sudden stop. The second happens a split second later when anyone not buckled in can fly forward into the steering wheel, windshield, dashboard, or front seat (from the back seat).

What do safety belts do?

In a crash or sudden stop, safety seats and belts hold everyone in place. This helps keep them from hitting the inside of the car or each other. Safety seats and belts also keep them from being thrown through the windshield or out a door.

Can wearing a safety belt really prevent injury to my unborn baby?

Research of crashes and safety belt use in pregnant women suggests that about four out of five babies would have been saved if their mothers had worn safety belts.

How should I wear a safety belt during pregnancy?

When wearing your safety belt, follow these rules:

- Always wear both the lap and shoulder belt.
- Buckle the lap belt low on your hip bones, below your belly.
- Place the shoulder belt off to the side of your belly and across the center of your chest (between your breasts).
- Never place the shoulder belt under your arm.
- Make sure the belts fit snugly.

The upper part of the belt should cross your shoulder without chafing your neck. Never slip the upper part of the belt off your shoulder or behind your back. Safety belts worn too loosely or too high on the belly can cause broken ribs or injuries to your belly.



Correct way to wear a safety belt when you are pregnant

Where are airbags located?

Air bags are inside the steering wheel and dashboard in front of the passenger seat. Some cars have extra air bags to protect people if the car is hit from the side.

How should I travel during pregnancy in a car with air bags?

Pregnant women should not turn off air bags. The air bag is made to work with the safety belt. Using them together protects both the mother and her unborn baby. Follow these tips if your car has air bags:

- Buckle up with both the lap and shoulder belts on every trip.
- If you are driving, the steering wheel should be at least 10 inches from your breastbone.
- When your belly gets big, you may not be able to keep much space between you and the steering wheel. If the car has a tilt steering wheel, make sure that it is angled toward your breastbone, not your belly or head.

When should I get a safety seat for my baby?

You will need a safety seat for your baby's first ride home from the hospital. Plan to get a safety seat well before your due date. You will need time to practice using the seat in your car before your baby's first car ride.

Where should an infant safety seat be installed?

The safest place in the car for an infant is facing the rear of the car in the back seat. The back of the safety seat supports the baby's back, neck, and head in a crash. If your baby's head flops forward, place a rolled towel under the front edge of the child safety seat. Also, place rolled towels or blankets on both sides of the baby's head and shoulders for support.

What types of safety seats are available for infants?

Three kinds of safety seats are available for infants:

1. An infant-only seat is a rear-facing seat that can be used from birth to 35 pounds, depending on the model. An infant-only seat usually snaps onto a base that remains in the car.
2. A convertible seat is used rear-facing until the child is aged 2 years or has reached the rear-facing height or weight limit for the seat model. The seat then converts to a forward-facing seat.
3. A 3-in-1 seat is used rear-facing until the child is aged 2 years or has reached the rear-facing height or weight limit for the seat model. The seat then converts to a forward-facing seat. When the child is aged at least 4 years or weighs 40–80 pounds, the seat can be converted to a booster seat.

What is a booster seat?

Children need booster seats when they get too big to fit into forward-facing seats. Booster seats do not come with harness straps. They must be used with a standard lap and shoulder belt. Booster seats are used until children can use safety belts like adults.

What is LATCH?

Newer cars and trucks have the LATCH system for installing child safety seats. LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. Special anchors, instead of safety belts, hold the seat in place. If either your car or your safety seat is not fitted with LATCH, you will need to use safety belts to install the car safety seat.

What should I be aware of when buying a safety seat?

When buying a seat, keep these tips in mind:

- Know whether your car has the LATCH system.
- Try locking and unlocking the buckle while you are in the store. Try changing the lengths of the straps.

- Try the seat in your car to make sure it fits.
- Read the labels to check weight limits.
- Do not buy a used car seat if you do not know its history (whether it has been in a car crash).
- Do not buy a used car seat that looks old or worn, is missing labels with the model number and maker's name, or is damaged.
- Check the expiration date on used seats and monitor the date on new ones.

Where can you find more information about child safety seats?

Contact the following organizations to find out more about car safety for you and your baby:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590
Web site: www.nhtsa.dot.gov

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Plain Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Web site: www.aap.org

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Web site: www.seatcheck.org

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Highway Loss Data Institute
1005 North Glebe Road, Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22201
Web site: www.iihs.org

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ018: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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