Car Seat Safety for Kids

Premature Babies and Babies with Medical Conditions

Even with the best prenatal care, sometimes your baby wants to arrive a little earlier than planned. If this happens, your hospital will want to make sure your baby can travel safely in the car. Usually, infants born earlier than 37 weeks will need a tolerance test, also known as a car seat test. Babies with other medical conditions or those who may not tolerate sitting in a semi-reclined position, such as a rear-facing car seat, may also need this test.

Car seat test

The Car seat challenge is usually done in the hospital within one week before your baby is ready to go home. You will be asked to bring in your baby’s car seat, which he will sit in for 90 to 120 minutes or the length of the car ride home, whichever is longer. During the test, the nurse will monitor your baby’s heart rate, breathing and oxygen level. If your baby passes the car seat challenge, he will be able to use the car seat you have provided. If not, the hospital may repeat the same car seat test.

Tips for Car Seat Safety for Premature Babies

If your pediatrician determines that it is safe for your baby use a traditional car seat, follow these tips to safely position your baby in a traditional safety seat:

1. When choosing your car seat, select one with the shortest distance from the crotch strap to the seat back, or one that has an adjustable crotch strap; this will prevent your baby from moving forward under the harness.
2. Make sure you check the weight requirements on the car seat and that your baby weighs enough to use the seat.
3. Use an Infant-only car seat with three- or five-point harness systems or convertible car seats with five-point harness system to provide the best comfort and positioning for your baby.
4. Do not use a car seat with a shield or arm rest. It may cause breathing problems or an injury to your baby’s face and/or neck during a sudden stop or crash.
5. Only use head supports that come with the car seat. Do not use any head supports that are purchased separately. Most very small babies may need additional positioning assistance; you can put a blanket roll on each side of your baby to provide support for her head and body.

Additional equipment

- If your baby goes home on a monitor, make sure to have enough battery power for at least twice the length of your car ride.
- Wedge any portable medical equipment on the floor of the car or under the seat. This reduces the risk of it flying loose in a crash or sudden stop.