

News You Can Use:

# Choosing the Right Car Seat

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## What is the Best Car Seat?

The short answer is: The one that fits your child, your vehicle, your budget and that you can use correctly every time. The best way to choose a seat is to look at the age-size-weight of the child, check your vehicles owners manual to see what types of mechanisms are in place for securing child restraints, and think about any behavioral or developmental issues that your child may have as well as any physical limitations that someone using the seat may have.

Choosing a child's car seat is one of the most important decisions a parent or caregiver can make. This article will describe the various types of car seats available today and will give some guidance as to how to choose the right seat for any child.

All states have laws concerning child passenger safety so it is important to check with any states that you may be visiting to make sure that your child restraints meet or exceed the standards set by law. In Maryland it is the law that a child be restrained in a child restraint device until they are 6 years of age and 40 lbs.

## The Different Kinds of Child Restraints:

**INFANT ONLY SEATS** hold an infant rear facing only from approximately 5lbs - 30lbs. Many of these seats have a base that stays attached to your vehicle. The car seat must not touch the back of the front seat. These carriers can then be used to hold your child while you do other things outside your car and may even fit in strollers to allow you to wheel your baby on outings. It is very important to make sure that your child is securely restrained in the harness at all times while they are in the carrier even if you are not in a vehicle.

**CONVERTABLE SEATS** can also be used for infants from about 5 lbs to 35 lbs rear facing. They can also be used forward facing for older toddlers from approximately 20-65 lbs. These seats are nice for someone who wants a seat that will last many years so they don't have to buy multiple car seats. They can also hold a child rear facing longer which is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. At a minimum, a child needs to be 1 year of age and 20 lbs before they can safely ride forward facing, but keeping them rear facing until they meet the weight limits of the seat or have less than one inch of hard shell above their head is now recommended. It is ok for their legs to touch the back seat or for them to sit with their legs curled in front of them this will not cause injury to the child. Convertible car seats when used rear facing can also touch the front seat.

**COMBINATION SEATS** are forward facing only for children over 1 year of age and more than 20 lbs. These seats will hold a child harnessed to 40-65 lbs depending on the seat and then will convert to a belt -positioning booster.

**YOUTH SEATS** will hold a child forward facing in a five point harness from 20 -80 lbs. There is one on the market today made by BRITAX. This is a good choice for a heavier or taller child who is not mature enough for a belt positioning booster or for a caregiver who wants to keep their child in a harnessed seat as long as possible since this is the safest way for children to ride.

Peg Perego Infant Carrier Car Seat:



Evenflo Convertible Car Seat:





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**BELT POSITIONING BOOSTER** are designed to allow the car seat belt to fit a child properly. These seats do not have their own harness systems and do not attach to the vehicle. The seat is placed in the seat of the car and a child usually between 30-100lbs sits in the seat and the car's seat belt is fastened around both. Some of these are also harnesses or vests such as the *RIDESAFER*. This keeps the seat belt across the shoulder, middle of the chest and across the hips of the child. These seats are needed until a child is able to sit correctly in the seat belt of the car alone.

**SEAT BELT ONLY** is reserved for children that can sit with their back against the seat and their legs bent at the edge of the seat cushion. The child must be able to sit with the vehicle seat belt across their shoulder, chest and hips for the entire trip. Most children cannot do this until they are at least 4ft 9in tall and usually between 8-11 years of age.

The RideSafer vest is an alternative portable car seat for ages 6 and up.



### Installation, Safety Checks, and Other Considerations:

It is important to check any car seat you plan to buy carefully. Make sure that it has no signs of wear on any surface or webbing, make sure that all pieces are there and that they all function correctly, make sure the seat has no cracks or other obvious defects and make sure the instructions are present. Instruction manuals are often available on the internet or at no charge from the manufacturer. When buying used or passing down a seat from one child to the next, be sure the seat is not past its expiration date. Most car seats are good for only 6 years from their date of manufacture.

Always check your vehicle's owner's manual before trying to install a child restraint. Some vehicles have seating positions that will not accommodate a child restraint. Many cars today have L.A.T.C.H. (lower anchors and tethers) this is an alternative method for installing car seats but is not any safer than using the seat belts. It is important to check to see which method gives the best installation in every vehicle. Do not use after market products designed to tighten your seat belts as these can come loose in a crash or damage your seat belt causing unsafe conditions.

When a car seat is properly installed, it should not move more than an inch at the belt path- this is where the seat is strapped into your vehicle either with the seatbelt or with latch. You may have some movement of the seat at the top or in the case of rear facing seats at the front of the seat and this is ok as long as the seat is tightly secured at the belt path.

When using your seat make sure that your child is seated comfortably in the seat. Do not use extra padding, cushions or head supports that did not come with your seat. You also do not want your child to be wearing thick or heavy clothing while in the seat as this can interfere with the harness and make it difficult to tighten properly. The child should be sitting with their back against the seat back and their bottom on the bottom of the seat. The straps should come over the child's hips and over the shoulders without twisting. The buckles should be buckled and the retainer/chest clip should be fastened at armpit level. The harness should then be tightened until you cannot pinch any webbing away from the child or 1 finger at the most can fit under the harness at any point. Make sure that as you tighten the harness it is not twisting or bunching anywhere and if it is, take your child out and rethread the harness so that it is flat.

There are many places that you can have your car seat checked. Child passenger safety technicians are taught how to use a variety of seats and how to fix some of the most common problems people installing them. It is also a good idea to have your seat checked even if it doesn't seem to have any problems since an extra pair of eyes or hands may spot something that will make it even better and it makes every tech happy to tell a parent they have done a perfect job.

If you have any questions about your seats or want to schedule an appointment to have your seats checked please call the store and ask to speak to Susan (a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician) or you may call her directly at 240-674-7236. These appointments are free and you will receive a coupon good for future shopping at Enkore Kids when your seat is checked.

Enkore Kids specializes in "previously-loved" children's clothing, developmental toys, and kid-related equipment for newborns to age 8. We also carry high-quality new items from vendors such as Robeez, Ergo, Melissa & Doug, Baby Einstein, and Clean Shopper. In reselling car seats, we only accept car seats from the original purchaser that have not been in an accident and are less than 3 years old. We also check for recalls.

Our "News You Can Use" Series includes several other issues that are added to regularly. Be sure to check our website for additional guides coming soon. This information is a starting point and should not be considered all-inclusive. If you'd like to offer suggestions for future issues, please call the store at 301-668-0837.