

Are You Pregnant?

Buckling up for Two

Protecting yourself protects your baby in a car crash.

The Basics

- **Get checked at a hospital emergency room if you are in any kind of crash.** Even in a minor crash, your unborn baby could be seriously injured. This can happen even if you don't feel hurt.
- Always use a lap-shoulder belt. It gives much more protection than a lap belt alone.
- Wear the seat belt correctly. (See the next column.)
- Sit as far back from the steering wheel as possible. Tilt it toward your chest, not up toward your face.
- An air bag will help you and your unborn baby in a crash. However, it is always best to sit far back from the steering wheel. The air bag is stored there.
- Let others do the driving in the last few months of pregnancy.
- Sit in the back seat whenever possible. The center of the back seat is safest—if it has a lap-shoulder belt.
- Travel as little as possible. (See the next column.)
- Make sure you are riding with a driver who has not been drinking or using drugs.
- Make sure the car is in good condition.

A car crash is one of the biggest dangers facing your unborn baby.

Car crashes kill and injure more unborn babies than babies in their first year of life. There are many things you can do to keep both of you safe.

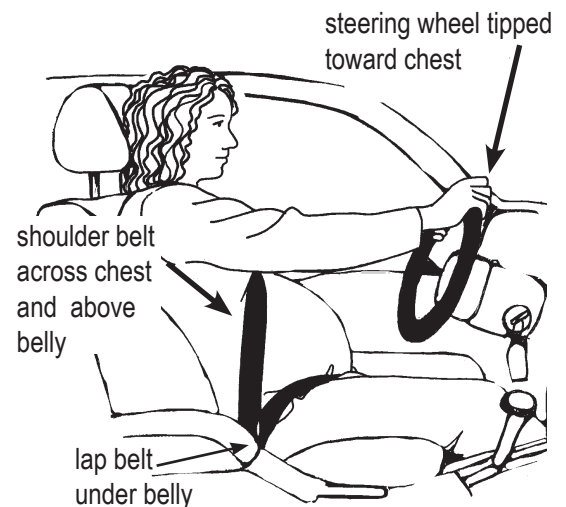
The right way to use a safety belt while pregnant

Keep lap and shoulder belts snug. Pull up on the shoulder belt to tighten the lap belt.

Push the lap belt down as far as possible below your belly. Check to make sure it stays low.

Keep the shoulder belt across the middle of your shoulder. Never put it under your arm or off your shoulder. That is very dangerous.

If you are wearing a coat, open it and pull it out from under the belt and to the sides, away from your belly. This helps the lap part of the belt stay low.



Move seat back as far as possible. Use both lap and shoulder belts on every ride.

Other ways to protect your unborn baby

Drive less often if you can. Car pool to work so you are not behind the wheel. Plan your errands so you make fewer trips. Shop online. Ask people to visit you. Go by air instead of by car if you must take a long trip.

Avoid crash risks. Avoid driving at night and in bad weather when possible. Avoid driving when sleepy or using a cell phone. Make sure any driver you ride with is not sleepy and has not been using alcohol or drugs.

Use a safe car. Make sure your car is in good condition. Check your vehicle tires, brakes, and lights often. If you are buying a car, choose one that has good safety ratings. (Find crash ratings of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety at www.iihs.org).



Basics of Newborn Car Safety

Never carry a baby in your arms in the car. It would be impossible to hold onto a baby in a crash.

Use a rear-facing car safety seat (car seat) as long as possible, up to at least 18 to 24 months. This is safest. It protects a baby from head or spinal cord injury.

Baby always rides in the back seat. The back seat is much safer than the front seat. The center of the back seat is safest.

If there is no space for baby's seat in back, turn the passenger air bag off. (See the car owner's manual.)

Make sure the seat belt or LATCH attachments hold the car seat tightly. It should move less than one inch forward or side to side.

Buckle and tighten the harness snugly over your baby's shoulders. Do not wrap baby in a blankets. Put a blanket over the harness *after* you buckle and tighten it.

Always follow car seat instructions and car manual to install and use the car seat correctly.

Before birth

1. Go to a car seat safety class. Call your hospital or clinic to find one.
2. Practice installing the baby's seat in the car and adjusting the straps. Follow the instructions! All car seats do not work the same way.
3. Find a Child Passenger Safety Technician in your area if you need help. (See Resources.)

Take to the hospital

- Baby clothes with legs, a blanket
- Instruction manuals for both baby's car seat and the car
- Two small blankets, a washcloth and two old towels for padding

Choosing a car seat

Three kinds of car seats for newborns (pictures at right):

- An infant-only seat is small and can only be used facing the rear. You will need a convertible seat later to keep your baby rear facing as long as possible.
- A convertible seat faces the rear for a baby up to 30 to 45 pounds. It can be turned to face forward for a heavier child. Choose one with a harness, not a shield.
- A car bed is for a baby whose doctor recommends the baby must lie flat.

Try the car seat in your car. Make sure it can be installed tightly in the back seat using the seat belt or LATCH straps. If it does not fit, replace it.

Good features to get:

Low shoulder harness position.

Look for lowest slots less than 8 inches from the bottom of the seatpad. (See Resources)

Harness adjuster that is easy to reach and use. A pull strap in front is usually easiest.

Tips for second-hand car seats:

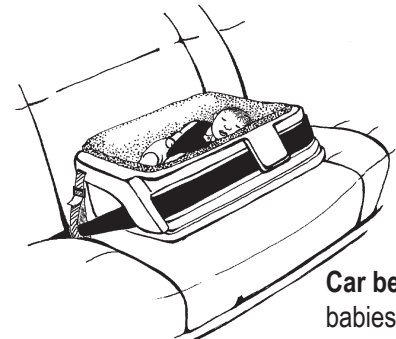
- Newer seats are easier to use and may have better safety features.
- Check for an expiration date. If there is none, do not use the car seat if it is over six years old.
- If the car seat has been in a crash, it should not be used again.
- Order missing parts and instructions from the maker's website.



Infant-only seat for babies up to 20 to 35 pounds (check label)



Convertible seat for babies up to 30 to 40 pounds facing the rear



Car bed for babies with medical needs

Resources

Advocates for Auto Safety During Pregnancy:

www.pregnantcrash.org

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:

800-745-7233 or www.carseat.org

National Auto Safety Hotline:

888-327-4236, 800-424-9153 (tty) or www.safercar.gov

Find a local Child Passenger Safety Technician: 866-732-8243 or

www.seatcheck.org

American Academy of Pediatrics:

www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm

List of car seats with low harness slots:

www.saferidenews.com