

# Car-seat safety

## A lifesaving guide

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A car seat can make the difference between life and death in an accident. But the safest seat isn't necessarily the most expensive or the one your friends recommend. It's the one that fits your child and is used right—every time. Unfortunately, we're not doing so well with that. As many as 80 percent of car seats on the road today are installed or used incorrectly, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Here's what the nation's top experts told us you need to know *now*:

### Infant seats (REAR-FACING ONLY)

From birth until around 20 pounds. The rear-facing position offers the best protection for your baby's head, neck, and spine.

**Install the seat at a 45-degree angle.** If it lies too flat, your baby may slide out between the straps; if it's too upright, her head may flop forward, making breathing difficult. If your model doesn't come with an angle adjuster, wedge a rolled towel under the base.

**The carry handle should be in the down position** for most infant seats. Check your manual to be sure.

**The harness straps should be in slots at or below your baby's shoulders**, the top of the harness clip should be at armpit level, and the harness should lie flat. If you can pinch a fold in the straps, it's too loose.

**The seat must be tightly secured to the backseat—where all car seats belong—either with the vehicle's safety belt or LATCH** (see below). If your model has a detachable base, be sure the seat is snapped firmly into it.

### What is LATCH?

Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH) is a system that you can use to secure your car seat instead of safety belts. It's required on all car seats (except boosters) and vehicles manufactured after September 1, 2002. But if you have an older car, properly installing the car seat with a safety belt is as safe as using LATCH.

**When properly installed, all car seats will move less than an inch** when you tug on them in any direction at the belt path.

