

Choosing a Car Seat

Parents often ask which of the many car seats is the best car seat on the market. The truth is, the best car seat is the one that fits your vehicle, your budget, your baby and that you will use properly each time your baby rides in the car. Use the following criteria to determine which car seat is the best choice for your baby.

All car seats sold in NZ must pass the same safety standards. Some car seats may have extra features that make them easier to install correctly, such as built-in locking clips or non-twisting straps. Because proper installation is key in car seat safety, these installation helpers may add safety for some people. However, even the cheapest car seat in the store, with no extra features, has passed the basic NZ crash tests and is safe for your baby when installed properly.

Use your baby's height, weight and age to choose the type of car seat to use.

Rear-facing-only Infant Car Seats (Capsules)

- Are used from birth through to about 10kg.
- Can only be used rear-facing
- Are small and portable and fit newborns the best
- Are used for babies up to one year of age (depending on model)

Infant seat features

- **Detachable base** - Several models of infant seats at BabySafe come with detachable bases. The base stays attached in the car, and you simply unlock the seat. When you are ready to drive in your car again, you buckle your baby in the seat and lock in the seat to the base. This is a time saver because you do not need to belt down the base every time you get ready to leave in your car. You can also buy additional bases to leave in other cars, and then transfer just the seat between cars. While the detachable base feature is helpful, in some cases the base may not fit correctly in your car, in which case it is better to just properly install the seat without the base.
- **Higher weight limits** - Several infant seats are available for use up to 10kg. This can make it easier to keep your baby rear facing for a full year. However, if your baby's weight exceeds the 10kg limit before a year, you should use a rear facing convertible seat that has a higher weight limit.
- **Harness slots** - Infants seats that come with more than one harness slot give more room for your growing baby. On rear-facing seats, the harness slots should be at or below your baby's shoulders.
- **Handles** - Infant seats usually have carrying handles that vary in style and ease of use. Be sure to check with the instructions for adjusting the handle during travel. In most cases the handle should face towards the front of the car during travel.

Convertible Car Seats

- Are used rear-facing until baby is at least 1 year old and weighs at least 10kg., and forward-facing through the weight limit listed on the car seat.
- They do not tend to fit newborns as well as infant seats do
- Are generally bigger and heavier than infant seats, but can be used longer
- Can be used rear-facing for infants and forward-facing for toddlers
- Are used rear-facing up to one year of age and specified weight limit that depends on model being used.

- Can be used forward facing for toddlers who are at least one year of age and at **least 10kg**. Use rear facing as long as possible.
- Are available in two types of harnesses. The 5-point harness has five straps: two at the shoulders, two at the hips, and one at the crotch. The 3-point harness has a padded T-shaped or triangular shield attached to shoulder straps. Note: If you are using a convertible seat for a small infant, the best choice for a more secure fit is the 5-point harness.

Convertible seat features

- **Higher weight limits** - There are several convertible seats that are now available with higher weight limits for bigger babies. If you have a larger baby, look for a seat that can be used rear-facing up to 12kg or more.
- **Adjustable buckles and shields** - There are many convertible seats that give you two or more buckle positions to give extra room for a growing child or thicker clothing (make sure the harness still holds your child snugly, and remember to readjust the buckle positions after the thicker clothes are no longer needed.)

Forward Facing Only seats

- Cannot be used rear-facing
- Are only for children over one year of age and over 10kg
- Some may convert to belt-positioning boosters for children over 40 pounds, which allows the seat to be used longer
- Boosters come in two types:
- Belt-positioning boosters - These boosters are used with lap/shoulder belts. The booster raises your child so that the seat belts fit properly. This helps protect your child's upper body and head.
- High Backed booster with 5 point harness - This type of seat attaches to the vehicle using LATCH (Isofix) or the existing seat belt. The 5 point harness then provides full body protection.

Can You Install and Use the Car Seat Easily?

The most expensive, feature-rich car seat is not safe for your baby if you don't take the time to read the directions and install it properly every time it is used. Check the car seat manual to be sure you can install and use the car seat as it is intended. Can you adjust the harness to secure baby in the car seat? Choose a car seat that you will use according to the instructions.

Does the Car Seat Fit Your Vehicle?

With so many vehicle seat styles, from benches to buckets, not all car seats will fit in every vehicle. It is essential to find a car seat that can be installed tightly, with the proper angle and less than an inch of side-to-side wiggle. Most reputable baby products stores will let you take a car seat floor model to your vehicle, possibly with a store employee, to check the fit before purchase. If not, check the return policy to be sure you can return the seat if it doesn't fit the vehicle. BabySafe has floor models of their advertised carseats, that you may like to see if they fit in your car to try out before you purchase.

Car Seat Recalls

Most recalled car seats are pulled from store shelves when the recall notice is issued. It's still a good idea to check with the manufacturer to be sure your new car seat is not affected by any recalls. If you have borrowed or purchased a used car seat, checking for recalls is even more important. If you also send in the registration card for a new car seat, you will be quickly notified if your baby's car seat is ever affected by a recall.

Are Used Car Seats Safe?

Steer clear of used car seats if you cannot get an accurate history of the car seat's use. You must know a car seat's crash history to determine safety. Buy used car seats only from people you know well enough to trust their account of the car seat's crash history. Car crashes can cause hidden damage to car seats, and the car seat could fail in a second crash, putting your child at risk of injury. Check to be sure no alterations have been made to used car seats.

Car Seat Accessories

When buying a car seat, bypass all of the car seat accessories and installation aids. If an item didn't come with the car seat, it's not safe to use it with the car seat. After-market car seat products aren't crash-tested with each car seat and could cause injury during a crash. This includes head positioners (unless it came with the car seat) and seat belt ratchets, which aren't needed if you install the car seat properly. Use of after-market products often voids the car seat warranty.

Keep Baby Safe As Long As Possible

The best way to keep baby safe in the car is to use a car seat with the most crash protection for as long as it fits your baby. You don't have to turn baby forward-facing right at one year and 10 kgs. Many seats today offer higher rear-facing weight limits, and this is a good option to choose if possible. Also look for higher forward-facing weight limits on 5-point harness seats, and keep your toddler in a booster seat as long as possible after he or she outgrows a regular car seat.

The Basics of Car Seat Use

- Always use a car seat, starting with your baby's first ride home from the hospital. Help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
- Read the manufacturer's instructions and always keep them with the car seat.
- Send in the registration card so that the manufacturer can notify you if there is a recall on your car seat.
- Read your vehicle owner's manual for more information on how to install the car seat.
- Never place a car seat near a car's airbag (front seat).
- Ideally put your child in the middle of the back seat. It is the safest place in the car because it is farthest away from a head-on crash (the most common type of crash).
- Attach firmly both the harness systems for your child and the seat belt connection to the car seat to protect your child.

Car seats at BabySafe

We have a range of styles, models and types of car seat to suit every situation. Our staff are trained in the safe and correct installation of car seats and are happy to talk through your unique requirements. Please feel free to come into our store or ask us a question on line – we love to help!

We also provide a car seat rental option, please check out the Hire tag on-line at www.babysafe.co.nz.