

# CAR SEATS AND BOOSTER SEATS:

What you need to know

# CAR SEATS AND BOOSTER SEATS:

## What you need to know

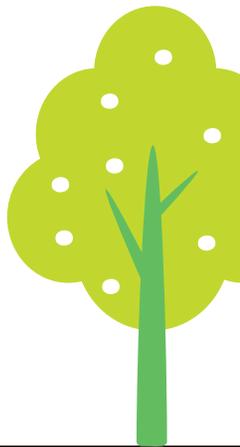
Using the correct seat for your child's weight, height and developmental ability, installing the car seat tightly and properly harnessing your child in their seat are all vital steps of safe car seat use. Always follow both car seat and vehicle manuals.

### Four stages of safe vehicle travel



#### Stage 1: Rear-facing car seat

- This can be an infant carrier, a rear-facing convertible or a rear-facing 3-in-1 car seat
- Never place a rear-facing car seat in the front seat where there is an active passenger airbag
- Once a baby has reached the maximum height or weight limit of the infant carrier, he or she should be moved to a rear-facing convertible or rear-facing 3-in-1 car seat
- For convertible or 3-in-1 car seats, refer to the car seat manual for weight and height limits and adjustments that need to be made as you switch from the rear-facing to forward-facing stage



At a minimum, babies should stay rear-facing until all three of these milestones are met:

- A minimum weight of 22 lbs (10 kg)
- Able to walk unassisted
- At least one year of age

**It is safest to keep your baby rear-facing for as long as he or she is within the weight and height limits of your convertible or 3-in-1 car seat.**

## Stage 2: Forward-facing car seat

- This can be a convertible car seat, a 3-in-1 car seat or a combination car seat
- For 3-in-1 or combination car seats, refer to the car seat manual for weight and height limits and adjustments that need to be made as you switch from the forward-facing with harnessing stage to a booster seat



In Ontario, a child must be in a forward-facing car seat until he or she is a minimum of 40 lbs (18 kg). **It is safest to keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with harness straps for as long as he or she is within the forward-facing weight and height limits of your convertible, 3-in-1 or combination car seat.**



## Stage 3: Booster seat

- All booster seats must be used with a lap-shoulder seat belt
- A booster seat raises your child up so the seat belt is positioned properly over his or her body – the shoulder belt should lie snugly across your child's chest and shoulder, while the lap belt should rest low across his or her hips

**Booster seats come in two main types:**

- **High back booster:** this style is necessary when the back of the vehicle seat is low or does not have an adjustable headrest to provide proper head and neck protection for your child
- **Backless booster:** can be used when the vehicle seat is tall or the headrest can be adjusted to provide head and neck protection for your child

In Ontario, a child must be in a booster seat until he or she is 4'9" (145 cm), 80 lbs (36 kg) or eight years of age. **It is safest to keep children in booster seats as long as they are within the weight and height limits of their booster seat.**

## Stage 4: Seat belt

**Your child is ready for a lap/shoulder seat belt only when:**

He or she has a standing height of at least 4'9" (145 cm)

- His or her knees can bend over the edge of the seat while sitting upright with their back against the vehicle seat
- The seat belt fits snugly across his or her shoulder and chest, with the lap belt sitting across his or her hips



**Children under 13 years of age are safest in the back seat.**

**Never allow your child to put the shoulder belt under his or her arm or behind his or her back.**

# Choosing a car seat or booster seat

With the large variety of car seat styles available, it is not always easy to decide which one is the most appropriate for your child's weight, height and developmental ability.

New car seats purchased in Canada will have the National Safety Mark label attached to the seat, indicating that the seat complies with Canadian regulations and standards – **this is required by law**



- Many stores will not accept returns/exchanges of car seats. If you are unsure of a car seat's fit in your vehicle, ask a store employee if you can try installing their floor model in your vehicle to make sure your vehicle seat belt or LATCH system is compatible
- Read the manufacturer's instructions and keep them in a safe place
- Fill out and send in your car seat registration for potential recall notices

## Things to keep in mind when shopping for your car seat or booster seat

### Infant carrier (infant car seat)

- Some models have a minimum weight of 4 lbs (1.4 kg), which would be important for a premature or low birth weight newborn
- Some allow you to adjust the harnessing height without having to rethread the straps
- Most will allow you to install the carrier in a vehicle without the base which can be useful for taxis



### Convertible car seat (infant/child car seat)

- Some models have rear-facing weight limits up to or beyond 40 lbs (18 kg), forward-facing limits up to 65 lbs (29 kg) and height limits well above 40" (101 cm), allowing you to keep your baby or toddler rear-facing (and then your child forward-facing in a five-point harness) for as long as possible

- If considering a convertible car seat (rear-facing) for a newborn, make sure the harness straps are at or below baby's shoulders (for many models the lowest harness slot location is too high for a newborn)
- Some models allow you to adjust the harnessing height without having to take the car seat out of the vehicle and rethread the straps



### 3-in-1 car seat (infant/child/booster car seat)

- If considering a 3-in-1 car seat (rear-facing) for a newborn, make sure the harness straps are at or below baby's shoulders (for many models the lowest harness slot location is too high or a newborn)



### Combination car seat (child/booster car seat)

- Use this seat as a forward-facing car seat with the harness and tether strap up to the maximum weight or height limits for this stage (depending on model)
- Some models allow you to adjust the harnessing height without having to take the car seat out of the vehicle and rethread the straps
- Many models have forward-facing limits up to 65 lbs (29 kg) (along with higher height limits) allowing you to keep your child in a five-point harness well beyond the minimum criteria to switch to a booster



### Booster seat

- Many high back models can be converted to a backless model
- Booster seats need to be secured in your vehicle when your child is not in it. Some models have LATCH connectors so you do not always have to remember to buckle up your booster seat with the seat belt



# Used Car Seats

If you are planning to use an older car seat that you already own or borrow one from family or a friend, ask yourself these questions to help you decide if the seat is okay to use.

## 1 Does the seat have a label showing that it meets Canada Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (CMVSS)?

Car seats sold in Canada must have the National Safety Mark label (circular sticker with a maple leaf) which shows that it meets Transport Canada's Motor Vehicle Restraint Systems and Booster Seat Safety Regulations and related Canada Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (CMVSS). Only car seats that have the National Safety Mark label are legal for use in Ontario.



Updated car seat regulations came into effect in Canada on January 1, 2012. It is illegal to sell, loan, rent or give away a car seat that does not comply. Many car seat manufacturers were testing to these new regulations before they were required to do so – if the car seat has a date of manufacture before January 1, 2012, contact the company to check if it meets current Transport Canada regulations.

## 2 Is the car seat expired?

Every car seat manufacturer has different expiry dates – often you will find the expiry date for your seat on a label and/or stamped into the plastic shell of the seat. If you are unsure, contact the manufacturer for expiry information – you will need the make, model number and date of manufacture when you contact them. Do not use an expired car seat.

## 3 Has the seat been recalled for any safety defects?

Transport Canada issues an advisory notice when a car seat has a defect, does not meet safety standards or has other problems. Check the Transport Canada website with your car seat make, model number and date of manufacture to see if there are any problem(s) with the seat and what you would need to do to have it fixed.

## 4 Do you have a copy of the manufacturer's instructions?

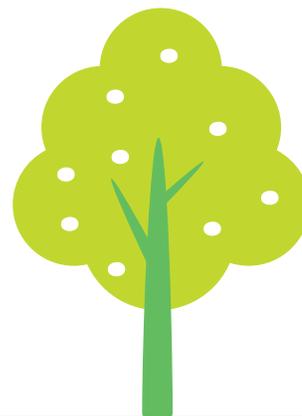
Labels on the car seat do not have all the information you need to know how to use the seat correctly. With the make, model number and date of manufacture, you can often download a copy of the instructions from the car seat manufacturer's website, or call their customer service phone number to have a copy sent to you.

## 5 Has the seat been involved in a motor vehicle collision?

If the seat has been in a collision, even if a baby/child was not in the car seat at the time, it should not be used. If you do not know the history, do not use the car seat.

## 6 Does the seat have all its parts: harness straps, chest clip, padding, tether straps and bolts? Are there any cracks, bends, or breaks in the plastic shell or metal frame? Are the harness straps worn or frayed? Does the buckle area show signs of rust?

The condition of the seat is very important. If you notice any of the above issues, the seat may not provide your baby or child with proper protection in a collision.



# Installing a car seat

After selecting the right seat for your child's weight, height and developmental ability, properly installing the seat in your vehicle is the next important step to ensuring your child is riding safe. Both your vehicle manual and the car seat manual will provide important information about installing your car seat.

## Option 1: Installing a car seat using LATCH

The Lower Anchorage and Tether for Children (LATCH) system, also called ISOFIX or Universal Anchorage System (UAS), exists for all vehicles and car seats manufactured after September 1, 2002. Do not use the LATCH system and the vehicle seat belt together — choose the system that offers the tightest fit.



Each vehicle LATCH position consists of two small bars built into the crease of the vehicle seat. Many vehicles only have the LATCH system in the outer back seat positions — refer to your vehicle manual to find out where the LATCH positions are located.

Car seats come with a separate strap with hooks that will clip onto the LATCH anchors in the vehicle. Refer to the car seat manual for information about the proper way to attach the hooks to the anchors. For car seats that can be installed forward-facing, there will also be a tether strap near the top of the car seat (see Tethering section).



## NOTE

 Many car seat and/or vehicle manufacturers are now requiring car seat installations to be switched from a LATCH installation to a seat belt installation once your child reaches a certain weight. If neither manual indicates when this is necessary, it is recommended to re-install your car seat with the vehicle seat belt once your child is 40lbs (18 kg).

## Option 2: Installing a car seat using a seat belt

If your vehicle does not have the LATCH system, the vehicle seating position you are installing a car seat in does not have LATCH anchor, or you are past the LATCH weight limits, you will use the vehicle seat belt to install the car seat. Once properly installed according to vehicle and car seat instructions, the seat belt or LATCH are equally safe.

## Which kinds of belts are in your vehicle?

There are also several kinds of retractors and latch plates to take up slack in the seat belt and properly secure occupants and car seats. Read your vehicle manual to find out what type(s) of seat belts are in your vehicle.

**Lap-shoulder belt with a free-sliding latch-plate:** Many vehicles have a lap-shoulder seat belt system that requires you to fully extend the seat belt out of the retractor to switch it into a locking mode when installing a car seat. However, a few vehicles have lap-shoulder belts that only lock in a sudden stop or collision. To secure this type of seat belt around a car seat, a metal “locking clip” is required. Your vehicle manual will let you know if you need a locking clip — use one only if it is required.

## How tightly should a car seat be installed?

To help ensure your seat is tight enough, push down on the car seat while you tighten the LATCH strap or seat belt. To check for a tight fit, try to pull the car seat away from the back of the vehicle seat and slide it from side to side where it is belted — the car seat should not loosen and should have less than one inch (2.5 cm) of movement where it is belted.



## Tethering for forward-facing car seats

All forward-facing car seats must be installed with the LATCH strap (or seat belt) and a tether strap. A tether strap anchors the upper part of a forward-facing car seat to the frame of the vehicle and limits how far forward a car seat can move in a collision. The tether strap needs to be tight, with less than one inch (2.5 cm) movement — push down on the car seat while tightening the tether strap. Check your vehicle manual for tether anchor locations; each forward-facing car seat will need its own tether anchor.



## Securing your baby/child in a car seat

The final step in using a car seat correctly is properly securing your child in his or her seat. Properly adjusted harness straps will effectively restrain your child in his or her car seat in a collision. Your car seat manual will provide specific instructions on how to adjust and tighten the straps.



### Harnessing tips:

The harness straps should fit snugly — only one finger should be able to fit between the harness and your child's collar bone. Or try the "pinch test": pinch the straps at your child's collarbone — if extra slack can be gathered between fingertips, the harness is too loose.

- Rear-facing seats: straps must lie flat and come through the back of the car seat **at or below** his or her shoulders
- Forward-facing seats: straps must lie flat and come through the back of the car seat **at or above** his or her shoulders
- The top of the chest clip should be at armpit level to hold the straps in place



## Third-party aftermarket products

Never put additional padding under or behind your child. This extra padding will compress during a collision, creating dangerous slack in the harnessing. Extra padding or accessories that came with the car seat have been crash-tested with the car seat and can be used according to the car seat manufacturer's instructions. Third-party aftermarket products are items not supplied with the car seat or made by the car seat manufacturer (e.g., padded infant car seat bags or child seat belt adjusters).



Transport Canada does not regulate third-party aftermarket products. Car seat manufacturers generally state in their instructions that no third-party aftermarket products should be used with their restraint systems. Adding these products could reduce the effectiveness of the car seat, booster seat or seat belt and prevent the restraint from performing as designed, resulting in an injury to your child. It is recommended you contact your car seat manufacturer before using any aftermarket product.

For more information, visit  
[www.swpublichealth.ca/your-health/child-and-family-health/child-safety](http://www.swpublichealth.ca/your-health/child-and-family-health/child-safety)



**St. Thomas Site**  
1230 Talbot St.  
St. Thomas, ON  
N5P 1G9  
☎ 519-631-9900  
☎ 1-800-922-0096

**Woodstock Site**  
410 Buller St.  
Woodstock, ON  
N4S 4N2  
☎ 519-421-9901  
☎ 1-800-922-0096

[www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca)





Adapted with the permission of York Region Community and Health Services