# Car Seat Testing and Safety: Information for Parents

If your baby was born before 37 weeks, he or she may participate in a car seat test, also known as a “car seat challenge,” before being discharged from the hospital. This test will last about 1–2 hours, during which your baby’s heart rate and breathing will be monitored. This test will determine if your infant can tolerate being in a car seat for a car ride.

Your baby should ride rear facing and in the back seat of your car until he or she is 2 years old or exceeds the maximum weight and height requirements for the car seat, as this is the safest position. Make sure you have read all car safety seat instructions as well as your car’s instruction manual to learn how to install your car seat properly *before* the day of discharge. Many fire departments, police stations, and hospitals have fitting stations with certified child passenger safety staff available to help parents and families determine if their car seat is installed correctly.

Never use a baby carrier in the car instead of a car seat. An infant car seat is a rear-facing seat only and has a convenient removable carrier that connects to a base installed in the car. This car seat provides the best fit for newborns and smaller babies and can be used from 4 pounds to 40 pounds, depending on the model. A convertible seat is a larger and heavier seat and can grow with your child. The recommendations for use are birth to 50 inches tall. For premature babies, this car seat might be too large to start with. You can use it rear facing until your child is at the 2-year recommendation, then forward facing until the weight limit, and then you can convert to a booster seat. This type of car seat stays in the car.

Make sure the straps in the car seat are properly positioned, secured, and fit snugly against your baby’s chest. You should only be able to fit two fingers in between your baby and the straps. Loose straps do not provide maximum safety. Every car seat has an expiration date; check to see when your car seat will expire. If you cannot find the expiration date on the car seat, contact the manufacturer.

When you are driving with your baby, try to bring another adult with you who can sit in the back seat to watch your baby. When you are traveling without another adult, remember to take your baby out of the car. Remember, you are never to leave your baby alone in a car.

More tips for keeping your baby safe on the car ride:

* Use car seats and seat belts on every single trip you take, even if it’s just down the street.
* Never use a car seat that has been in a car crash. To [find out more, visit www.nhtsa.gov.](http://www.nhtsa.gov/)
* Do not use a second-hand car seat, such as one from a garage sale or one from a friend or family member because you do not know if it has been damaged in a crash or recalled.
* Never use padding or other products that did not come with your car seat.
* Never use a car seat that has been recalled. Make sure that when you purchase your baby’s car seat that you fill out and return the registration form. This will ensure that you are informed of any recalls for the seat you purchased.
* For current, up-to-date information, visit www. safekids.org/ultimate-car-seat-guide.

