

The best child safety seat is the one that fits your baby, fits your vehicle, and will be used correctly every trip.

Used or New?

From diapers to doctor’s visits and everything in between, babies can be expensive. It can be tempting to want to save money with a used child safety seat. Although not everything for your baby has to be new, remember that this is safety equipment. Stay away from used seats at online auction sites, yard sales, and thrift stores. You don’t know who owned the seat or how they treated it. But, if the used seat comes from your own family or a trusted friend, it might be okay to use, if you take time to check the following:

- **Know the history of the seat.** Has it been in a crash? How were the padding, harness, and buckle cleaned? If anyone used harsh chemicals or put them in the dryer, it could have removed the flame-retardant properties or made the straps weaker.

- **Make sure the seat is complete,** including its instruction booklet. Ask the previous owner whether any pieces were removed, and check the list of parts in the instruction booklet. Can you see damage to the frame of the seat or its straps? Are all the labels still attached?

- **Consider the age of the seat.** Although it met federal safety standards when it first came out, current standards are somewhat stricter. Call the manufacturer to find out how long they recommend using that seat.

- **Call the manufacturer’s 1-800 number** (listed on the labels) to check for any recalls.
If you don’t have LATCH, you can still install your baby’s seat safely with a seat belt. Just make sure the belt “locks” the child safety seat in place. Some seat belts lock automatically. On others, you pull the seat belt all the way out to lock it. Some seat belts need an extra piece of hardware to make them lock. Check your vehicle owner’s manual to find out how your seat belts work.

Whether you use LATCH or the seat belt, make sure your baby’s seat is tightly installed. Put your hands near the seat belt openings on the sides of the safety seat, and pull the seat side-to-side and front-to-back. The safety seat shouldn’t move more than an inch.

Positioning Your Child  The straps that hold your baby in her seat are called the harness. Make sure the harness straps over her shoulders don’t come out of the back of the seat above her shoulders. If they do, check the instructions to find out how to lower the harness. Those straps should begin at or slightly below her shoulders to hold her safely in a rear-facing seat.

Also, the harness should be snug so you can’t pinch any extra webbing. Test it at the baby’s collarbone. Move the plastic retainer clip so it’s across the chest – about armpit level. This keeps the straps in the correct position so they won’t slide off the baby’s shoulders.

Don’t put anything under your baby or between his body and the harness. Even a heavy coat could keep the harness from doing its job in a crash. Instead, you can fill in extra space around the baby by placing rolled receiving blankets along both of his sides (as illustrated) and a rolled washcloth between his legs and the crotch strap. You can also put a blanket on top of the harness to keep him warm.

Things You Should Know  All infants and toddlers should ride rear-facing in a safety seat until they are 2 years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their safety seat manufacturer. Rear-facing is safest because it helps protect your child from spinal cord injuries in a crash. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ride rear-facing as long as possible – until they reach the upper weight limits of the seat. Some seats allow for rear-facing to 40 pounds. Be mindful of the seat’s height limits. Your child is usually too tall for the seat if the top of her head is within an inch of the top of the child safety seat.

Georgia law requires children under the age of 8 to ride in a child safety seat appropriate for their height and weight (with some exceptions) and used according to the manufacturer’s instructions. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children continue riding in child safety seats or boosters even longer. Most children don’t fit into seat belts until they’re about 4’9” tall, and between 8 and 12 years old. Make sure you and other adults wear seat belts to set a good example, and to keep you safe too. An unsecured passenger can cause injury to others in a crash.

The Bottom Line  After you unpack your new safety seat, do what many parents don’t: read the owner’s manual for the car seat and your vehicle. Eight out of 10 child safety seats are installed incorrectly. Make sure yours isn’t one of them!

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HELPFUL RESOURCES

For more information on child safety seats, go to the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site: www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm

You can also have your seat inspected by a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. Go to http://cert.safekids.org and click the “Find a Technician” link or call toll-free 866-SEATCHECK (866-732-8243) to locate a child safety seat inspection station and set up an installation appointment.

If you have questions, please contact us at the UGA Traffic Injury Prevention Institute: 1-800-342-9819 or www.ridesafegeorgia.org

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