

Car Seat Factsheet



A car seat is an essential item for your baby if you are going to travel in a vehicle with them, but remember:

Car seats are designed to keep babies safe while travelling, not as a main sleeping place.

Car seats should only be used for transport and not as an alternative for cots or high chairs. It's OK for your baby to fall asleep in a car seat when travelling, but they should be taken out as soon as you get home or to your destination, and placed onto a firm, flat surface to sleep.

The best place for your baby to sleep is in their own separate sleeping space such as a cot or Moses basket, in the same room as a parent or carer for the first six months.

How long can a baby travel in a car seat for?

There is no published evidence which sets out how long babies should be kept in a car seat when travelling. However, infant healthcare professionals, safety experts and most car manufacturers recommend that babies should not be in a car seat for longer than 2 hours at a time and they should be taken out frequently.

If your trip involves driving for long periods of time, you should stop for regular breaks. Not only will this allow you to stretch your own legs but you can check on your baby, take them out of the car seat and let them stretch and move around.

Ideally, a second adult should travel in the back of the car with your baby, or if travelling alone use a mirror to keep an eye on your baby.

If your baby changes its position and slumps forward, then you should immediately stop and take them out of the car seat and reposition them before continuing on your journey.

Are babies at a greater risk of SIDS in a car seat?

Avoid travelling in cars with pre-term and young babies for long distances. Research published in 2016 by the University of Bristol looked at the health impact on babies travelling in cars in infant car seats, and found pre-term and young babies may be at risk of breathing difficulties if travelling in an upright position in car seats for a long period of time.

You can read the findings of the research here <https://fn.bmj.com/content/102/2/F136>

My baby often falls asleep in their car seat – can I leave them in there?

It's OK for your baby to fall asleep in a car seat for a short amount of time when travelling, but they should be taken out of the car seat as soon as you get home or to your destination, and placed onto a firm, flat surface to sleep such as a cot or Moses basket.

Overheating

Babies that get too hot are at a greater risk of SIDS. We advise removing any hats or outdoor clothing such as snowsuits and coats once your baby is in the car. The best way to check your baby isn't getting too hot is to feel their tummy or back of their neck, if their skin feels clammy or sweaty they are too hot, so remove a layer of clothing, as young babies cannot regulate their temperature.

Car seats are essential for safety when travelling, but babies should not sleep in a car seat for long periods and moved to a clear sleep space when not travelling, such as a cot or Moses basket with a firm, flat mattress with a waterproof cover.

Car Seat Safety

Make sure you have a car seat which is suitable for your baby's weight and is correctly fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions (many shops will help with this).

Car seats must conform to safety standards - United Nations standard, ECE Regulation 44.04 (or R 44.03) or to the new i-size regulation, R129. Look for the 'E' mark label on the seat.

Do not buy or use a second-hand child seat as you cannot be certain of its history. It may have been involved in an accident and the damage may not be visible.

Follow all of our safer sleep advice to reduce the risks of SIDS

- Always place your baby on their back to sleep
- Keep your baby smoke free during pregnancy and after birth
- Place your baby to sleep in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as you for the first 6 months
- Breastfeed your baby
- Use a firm, flat, waterproof mattress in good condition