

Children's Health Clinic

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Tips for Infant Car Travel

Car travel can and should be a safe and pleasant time for you and your baby. This is an excellent time for you to talk to your baby and to teach your baby how enjoyable car travel can be.

1. Until the age of 12 months, a baby should be in an infant safety seat buckled to the car with the auto seat belt and positioned so that the baby rides facing backward. The rear middle seat is always the safest place for your infant, even if you are the only adult in the car.
2. If your vehicle has an airbag on the passenger side of the front seat, it is critical that you **do not** place your baby in the front seat. The airbag could cause serious injury to your baby.
3. Any time your baby is asleep while you are traveling, don't disturb him; leave him alone. An infant safety seat is the most comfortable place for your baby to sleep and you don't have to worry about his safety.
4. Any time that your baby is awake and behaving nicely (quiet, jabbering, looking around, etc.), make sure that you interact with your baby. In this way, your baby will learn to enjoy automobile travel because you are fun to ride with. You can try singing or humming songs, talking about what you are doing or where you are going. If your baby has a favorite blanket, place it next to or in the safety seat within her reach.
5. Carry 1 or 2 soft, stuffed toys that your baby will learn to associate with quiet travel. It may help to have special quiet riding toys that are played with only in the car. This helps decrease boredom. Remember your baby's attention span is very short. Don't expect him to stay occupied for more than a couple of minutes at most, particularly early in life.
6. Ignore yelling, screaming, and begging. The instant your baby is quiet, begin talking or singing to her again. You should not yell, scream, or nag. Do not take your baby out of the safety seat because she is crying. Doing so will only teach her to keep crying until you take her out. Try to take her out only when she is quiet.
7. Older brothers and sisters should also be expected to behave in the car and to ride with their seat belts fastened correctly. If your baby grows up always riding with a seat belt on, he will not mind having it on.

8. With your frequent praise and pleasant conversation, your child will remain interested and busy and will not spend her time crying for your attention.
9. If you are on a long trip, periodic rest stops will be necessary to feed your baby, change her diapers, etc. Do not start the habit of taking your child out of the safety seat when she is crying. Instead, when you know your child needs your attention (feeding or diaper change), try to stop before she starts to fuss.
10. If your baby is going to travel in an automobile with other drivers (grandparent, aunt, uncle, baby sitter, etc.), insist that they use the infant safety seat correctly fastened with the auto seat belt.
11. If you are pleasant and talk and interact with your baby during car rides, he will learn to enjoy both the safety seat and the rides in the car. If you allow your child to get accustomed to riding in the car without a safety seat, it will be harder to get him to use one correctly when he gets older.
12. Sometime around 12 months of age, you will need to either switch to a toddler safety seat or change the riding position of the infant safety seat if it is the convertible type. Read the directions that came with the seat or ask your pediatrician or the nurse when to switch to a toddler safety seat. Your child should continue to use a safety seat until she is about 8 to 10 years old, when she can comfortably see out of the car with just a seat belt on. Booster seats are available for children who are more than 4 years of age.
13. In all states it is illegal for a child to ride in the car without being securely buckled into a safety seat. It is illegal because it is very, very dangerous. Please do what is best for your baby--use a safety seat during every car ride.

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