

Car accidents are a leading cause of death in babies and children as well as a major cause of permanent brain damage, epilepsy and spinal cord injury. Most of these death and injuries can be prevented with the proper use of care safety seats.

Car Safety and Preventing Infant Deaths

Car accidents are the leading cause of death in children after the first few months of life. Of all deaths due to injury, two thirds are related to motor vehicles. In the one to four year old age group, two thirds of the children who are killed in car accidents are occupants of a car, and one third are pedestrians struck by a car. It has been estimated that eighty-five percent of those deaths and sixty-five percent of those injuries could have been prevented by the use of car seats and seat belts.

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Children can be injured by cars in two major ways. Children playing on the sidewalk may be hit by a car that jumps the curb, or they may be struck if they venture into the street. But more commonly, a child is hurt in when a car in which he or she is a passenger is involved in a collision. When a car stops suddenly, the unrestrained passengers continue to move at the original speed until he hits something that stops him. This is usually the interior of the car, but may be the ground if the passenger has been ejected. Children, who are at highest risk of injury in an accident, are those who are held in an adult's lap. Not only is the child thrown forward into the dashboard, but he is smashed from behind from the weight of the adult. Even if the passenger is belted in, it is nearly impossible to hold onto a child in a crash. For example, to hold on to a ten pound infant in a collision at thirty miles per hour requires the same amount of strength as lifting three hundred pounds one foot off the ground!

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A sudden stop at 30 miles an hour can have the same crushing force on your child's brain and body as a fall from a three story building.

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To prevent an auto injury to your child, you must address the issue of safety from the point of view of each of the ways in which injury occurs; you have to consider both pedestrian safety and auto safety.

To make sure your child isn't struck by a car, teach her how to respect the road and to walk defensively. Teach her to play in the yard or on the sidewalk, and to stay away from the street. Try to "keep the eye out" for her. As she gets older, teach her to look both ways before crossing the road. Be sure she knows how to read traffic signals.

To keep your child safe in the car, drive carefully and defensively. Follow the rules of the road. Don't allow your children to distract you-concentrate on driving. Avoid having any sharp or heavy objects in the car that could be flying missiles in a sudden stop or crash. But the most

important precaution doesn't concern your driving skills, but rather one simple plastic and metal device-a car seat.

Nearly all of the states and the District of Columbia require child restraints in automobiles. Tennessee was the first to require them, in 1977. Use of car seats in Tennessee increased from eight to twenty-nine percent in the two and a half years after the law was enacted. The number of children killed decreased from twenty-two in 1979 to ten in 1981. While states regulate their use, the federal government regulates the construction of car seats. Child seats must meet federal standards for crash protection, standards that are based on dynamic, rather than just static, testing.