

DID YOU KNOW???

REAR-FACING OR FRONT-FACING CAR SEAT – WHEN TO SWITCH

One of the most confusing subjects, triggering numerous inquiries from new parents, is how long their baby should stay in a rear-facing car seat. Although there's not an exact timeline, the rule of thumb now is that babies should be in rear-facing car seats for as long as possible, to the limits of the car seat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends that babies remain in rear-facing safety seats in the back seat of vehicles until at least age two and then beyond if possible. The most recent studies on this subject show that toddlers are up to **five times safer if they remain rear-facing until age two**. Turning baby's car seat around isn't a milestone to rush on. It's actually a step down in safety, so don't be in a hurry to make the switch!

Outdated information was that babies can ride forward-facing at one year old or 20 pounds from many well-meaning sources. That's the old standard. All children are safer if they remain in a rear-facing car seat beyond a year. New parents often turn to their family and friends with parenting experience when it comes to car seat safety advice, but if your family and friends are a few years out from having newborns and toddlers, it's possible, and even likely, that their car seat advice is outdated.

Car seats are designed to absorb some crash forces and spread remaining crash forces over a larger area of the body. For adults, seat belts distribute force to the strongest parts of the body, the hips and shoulders. Infants don't have many body parts that are strong enough to withstand crash forces, so the rear-facing car seat distributes the crash forces along the entire back, neck, and head, putting less stress on any one part of the body. The infant's head, which is large and heavy for a still delicate neck to support, is also better supported with a rear-facing car seat. The incidence of severe head and neck injuries for babies and toddlers is greatly reduced in rear-facing car seats. The additional support gives your baby the best chance of survival and less chance of injury in a crash.

Don't be worried that a baby will suffer broken legs in a crash because baby's legs touch the seat back or look cramped when rear-facing. Even if your baby's legs are touching the seatback, or the baby cries when rear-facing, you should still keep baby rear-facing until he or she reaches the rear-facing weight or height limit of the car seat. Most convertible car seats have rear-facing weight limits of 35-40 pounds now, so you should be able to keep your toddler rear-facing to age 2, if not longer.

The bottom line is that a rear-facing car seat offers the best protection for babies and toddlers and should be properly used for as long as possible, to the limits of the car seat. It is no longer recommended to turn your baby around immediately at one year and 20 pounds.

Much of the advice contained in this "Did You Know" article is from Heather Corley, a certified child passenger technician – instructor. Listen to the experts.