



# The Wellness Family

Drs. Daniel, Susi and Claudia Keep You Informed

## Car Seat Safety

Every day there are more than 2,600 children involved in automobile accidents. This is the equivalent of one child every 33 seconds. Automobile accidents are the leading cause of death for children between the ages of 3 and 14. The sad reality is that many of these deaths are preventable. It's a matter of knowing the best options to keep your child safe should you be involved in an automobile collision.

### Understanding the Stages of Car Seats

There are certain recommendations made by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that apply to each age group and should be considered prior to putting your child in any vehicle.

From birth to 12 months, a child should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. Infant-only car seats can only be used rear-facing but there are convertible and all-in-one car seats that have higher height and weight limits, making it possible for a child to stay rear facing up to 3 years. Depending upon your child's height and weight, keep your child rear-facing as long as possible for their safety.

From one year to 3 years old, it's possible that you already have your child in a forward-facing car seat but, remember, it's safer if they are rear-facing until as close to age 3 as possible. Regardless of when you move them to a forward-facing car seat, be sure to keep them in a car seat until at least the age of 7.

The forward-facing car seat provides a 5-point harness and tether restraint system that will keep them as safe as possible. The height and weight limits for these car seats are designed for the average child of 7. It may be that smaller 8 year olds can even still fit their car seat and, for their own sake, they should.

Once your child has outgrown their forward-facing car seat then they can graduate to the booster seat. The average child of ages 8-12 will need a booster seat and should remain in a booster seat until they are big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. This would mean that the lap belt would lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest, not crossing the neck or face.

While these stages are typically listed by age, the true determining factor is height and weight. Base your child's transition from one stage to another on the height and

weight limit of their current restraint system, not on their age. It is in their best interest.

### Proper Installation

Now that you know the right equipment for your child, it's important to know how to install it properly. All vehicles made since the year 2000 include a LATCH. This acronym stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. Most vehicles offer at least one LATCH in the rear window area for a car seat in the center of the back seat. Some automobiles offer three, one for each seat. This LATCH secures the tether strap found on all child restraint systems. The average SUV also has at least one LATCH in the cargo area of the vehicle.



*It's important to realize that even a child in a safety seat can be injured.*

The purpose is to help secure the car seat to the vehicle. It is vital that in the event of an auto accident and during the rapid deceleration of the vehicle, the car seat stays secured to the vehicle. Should the car seat be thrown forward with the child secured to the car seat, this may actually increase the injury sustained.

Unfortunately, research has shown that despite the fact that 96% of parents believe their car seat is installed correctly, 72-84% of all car seats are not. This means that only about 2 out of every 10 children are really safe when traveling by automobile and the chances of an inappropriately restrained child being seriously injured during an auto accident increase by 3 ½ times.

With older children, 83% ages 4-8 ride improperly restrained in adult seat belts only and only 19% of children who should be restrained in booster seats are actually using them; booster seats have proven to reduce injury to 4-8 year olds by 59%. Children ages 2-5 improperly restrained by a seat belt only are 4 times more likely to suffer a head injury compared to those in a child restraint.

Even worse, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that in a typical year there are over 600,000 children under the age of 12 riding in a vehicle with no restraint at all.

### **Location, Location, Location**

There are some facts that every parent needs to know without a doubt that can save their child's life. These facts could mean the difference between life and death in the event of an automobile accident.

The first fact is the location of the accident. Many parents choose not to fight with their child regarding proper restraint if they're just running down to the corner store for an emergency item. The risk here is that the majority of automobile accidents occur in just such a scenario – 75% of vehicle collisions occur within 25 miles from home.

The second fact is the location of the child in the car. Depending upon the age of the child, they are safest in the back seat. Vehicles with passenger seat airbags warn against children under the age of 13 riding in the front seat. Despite this warning and common sense, 30% of ten-year-olds are sitting in the front passenger seat and 55% of 13-year-olds. This would mean that somewhere between 30% and 55% of 11 and 12-year-olds are doing the same.

Children under the age of 13 should always be in the back seat and the safest place is in the center in the proper restraint system for their height and weight (not age). Studies have shown that children sitting in the center seat have a 43% lower risk of injury than those sitting near either door.

The third fact is the location of your nearest car seat inspection facility. Knowing the right restraint system for your child and the best location for the car seat does not absolutely insure your child's safety. For the sake of

your child, find a car seat inspection facility near you by going to [safercar.gov/parents/index.htm](http://safercar.gov/parents/index.htm).

### **Child Injury**

Most insurance companies and many parents mistakenly believe that a child in a car seat is somehow invulnerable. The parent will rush to the Chiropractor immediately after an automobile accident to get adjusted for themselves, not realizing that their child may be suffering the same discomfort. Generally, if a child doesn't complain of pain, it never occurs to a pediatrician or parent that any injury was sustained. Due to their inability to communicate their pain or discomfort, symptoms such as irritability, lethargy, restlessness, night terrors, poor focus and/or appetite, change in bowel movements and being very clingy, may be the only signs that an infant or child has suffered an injury.

It's important to realize that even a child in a safety seat can be injured. They're not being thrown around the car or into the back of the seat in front of them, but they are still suffering from the impact. Their body is held to the car by the restraint but their head and arms are thrown forward, which can cause mild to severe damage to their spine and nervous system.

Even the best-positioned and properly installed car seat can only afford your child a certain amount of protection from injury. No car seat, no matter how well it is installed, will guarantee that your child will not suffer injury in an auto accident. If you and your child have recently been involved in a motor vehicle collision, contact your Family Wellness Chiropractor to schedule a brief examination. It is better to have your child checked and find out that there is nothing wrong, than to assume they are fine and find out later that there was severe damage done to their still developing spine.



*Dear Patient,  
Drs. Daniel, Susi and Claudia are dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

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