



Car Safety for Children with Down Syndrome

Children with Down syndrome may have special needs that can affect how they travel. This tip sheet answers some questions you may have about transporting your child.



Figure 1

How long should my child ride rear-facing?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends you keep your child rear-facing until age 2 (Figure 1) or until they reach the maximum height and weight for the car safety seat they are using. Since some children with Down syndrome have decreased muscle tone or unstable neck bones, riding rear-facing helps

support their entire body and protects them from injury, especially to the spine. Most new rear-facing only and convertible car safety seats (Figure 1) allow children to ride rear-facing up to 35 or 40 pounds.



Figure 2

Will the car seat harness straps hurt my child after heart surgery?

Ask your surgeon if you are worried that your car seat's harness straps will put too much pressure on your child's stitches (Figure 2). If this is a problem, you may need to use a different car seat.

Pressure from harness straps in a crash is less in a rear-facing position.



Figure 3
Use a forward-facing car safety seat that has a 5-point harness until your child outgrows the maximum height or weight allowed by the manufacturer. Many forward-facing car safety seats allow children to remain in a harness system up to 65 pounds or more (Figure 3). A child passenger safety technician may be able to give you information about car safety seats with more recline. You can find a technician in your area by visiting:

<http://cert.safekids.org> and clicking on “Find a Tech.”

What if my child has trouble sitting up?

If your child fits well in a conventional car safety seat (rear or forward-facing) and needs only minimal additional support, you can place rolled blankets or towels along the side of your child’s trunk to prevent your child from leaning side to side. Never put anything behind your child or under the harness.



Figure 6

What if my child is too big for the car seats at the store?

Some children with Down syndrome outgrow car seats from the store but need additional support due to difficulty holding their body up or difficulty understanding the importance of staying buckled up. Your child may need a large medical car safety seat (Figure 6) . Large medical seats have harnesses for weights as high as 135-150 pounds and offer a variety of accessories,

such as trunk support or escape proof accessories to meet your child’s unique transportation and positioning needs. It is important to work with your child’s medical team to determine the best large medical seat for her. Large medical seats are usually ordered through a local durable medical equipment vendor. Insurance or, in some states, Medicaid may cover the cost if proper documentation is provided.



Figure 5

What if my child has a tracheostomy?

Use a car seat with a five-point harness. A five-point harness has straps that come over your child's shoulders and hips and buckle into a crotch strap (Figure 5).



Figure 6

When can my child ride in a booster seat?

If your child does not need additional support and will stay buckled up, he may be able to use a booster seat after he outgrows his car safety seat with a harness (Figure 6). This is usually when a child weighs about 40 pounds and is about 4 years old. A belt-positioning booster seat will lift up your child so the seat belt fits properly and will make your child safer in a crash. Never use a booster seat with a lap-only seat belt.

When will my child be ready to use a seat belt?

Your child must be able to sit all the way back against the vehicle seat without slouching, bend his knees easily over the edge of the seat, and wear the lap/shoulder seat belt flat and snug on his upper thighs and between his neck and shoulder. This is usually when a child is about 8-12 years.

When may my child ride in the front seat?

The back seat is the safest place for all children 12 years and younger, even if your car does not have an airbag.

Where should I put medical equipment in the car?

Place medical equipment such as apnea monitors on the floor of the vehicle wedged with pillows, foam or blankets. Equipment can also be tied down with unused seat belts. There are no straps or belts available for securing equipment in a vehicle. Some vehicles do not allow putting objects under the front passenger seat as they may interfere with advanced airbag sensors. Check with the vehicle owner's manual.



Figure 7

How should my child ride in a school bus?

Preschool-age children who weigh less than 40 pounds should use a car safety seat or school bus specific restraint on a school bus (Figure 7). When she is older, she may need to ride in an upright vest, a large medical seat, or a wheelchair if she has trouble walking. Talk with the school about your child's transportation needs. Make sure they are included in her IEP (Individual Education Plan).

How can I be sure my child is buckled up correctly?

Always read and follow the directions that come with your car safety seat and your vehicle owner's manual. You can find a certified child passenger safety technician who is trained in special needs transportation at <http://cert.safekids.org>. Click on "Find a Tech." In the CPS Technician search form, make sure to click "Special Needs" in the Extra Training field. If there is not someone trained in special needs transportation in your area, please call 800-755-0912 for further assistance.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

National Center for the Safe Transportation of Children with Special Healthcare Needs, Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, IN.

800-755-0912

www.preventinjury.org

Inclusion of products in this brochure does not imply endorsement.

Figure 7 source:www.imminet.com

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This brochure was developed by the National Center for the Safe Transportation of Children with Special Healthcare Needs and funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Safety Council.

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Revised 5-30-14
P- 5-30-14