

Appendix 6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAR SEAT POSITIONING

Car Seats and Car Beds:

Positioning LBW infants properly in a car seat can be difficult, particularly if the infant is still small at the time of hospital discharge. Most safety restraints currently on the market are designed for infants weighing 3.5 kilograms (7 pounds). Three manufacturers, Baby Trend, Safetyfirst/Costco and Evenflo, make a car seat model that is smaller. It is advised to select a car seat with: 1) a crotch strap distance of less than 5.5 inches from the seat back, and 2) a distance of less than 8 inches from the lowest shoulder strap position to the seat bottom.

A significant concern for car seat positioning of the LBW infant is respiratory compromise. Premature and LBW infants are at greater risk for poor oxygenation in the semi-upright position in a car seat. AAP recommends that all infants born before 37 weeks gestation have a car seat check, including assessment for possible oxygen desaturation, before hospital discharge. Although infants must pass a car seat test prior to discharge, it is still recommended that the infant be closely monitored during travel, and if possible have an adult ride next to the infant in the back seat. For infants at risk of respiratory compromise, travel should be kept to a minimum.

Car Seat Position: All infants, including preterm infants, must ride in a rear-facing car seat until 12 months of age (corrected age for preemies) AND at least 20 pounds. If the vehicle seat slopes such that the infant's head flops forward, the car seat should be installed at a 45 degree angle (reclined halfway back). If needed, a roll of cloth or newspaper can be wedged under the foot end of the car seat to achieve this angle.

Infant Positioning: The infant's buttocks should be against the back of the car seat. It is not permitted and is unsafe to pad a car seat behind the infant's back or under the buttocks. If there is additional space between the infant and the crotch strap (when buttocks are fully back), this space should be filled in to assure a snug fit and prevent slouching. A rolled blanket can be used for padding between the infant's crotch and the buckle. Blanket rolls can also be placed on either side of the infant for lateral support of the head and neck.

The position of the shoulder slot used for the shoulder strap must be at or below the level of the infant's shoulders. The harness should fit snugly and the chest clip positioned at the level of the axilla. A car seat with a tray or shield will initially be too big for LBW infants.

Parents should avoid using bulky snowsuits or wrapping the infant in blankets. An extra blanket can be placed OVER the infant once positioned properly in the car seat.

See www.aap.org/policy/01351.html (*Safe Transportation of Premature and Low Birth Weight Infants*) for illustrations of the various positioning recommendations described above.

Car Beds: Infants with documented desaturation, apnea, or bradycardia in a semiupright position should travel in a supine or prone position in an alternative safety device. While not crash-tested, car beds offer an alternative for infants with exceptional needs. Car beds are not as safe as car seats. Use of a car bed should be minimized and used only for absolutely necessary trips. Before transitioning from a car bed to a car seat, an oximetry test while positioned in the infant's personal car seat is needed.