

# The Wellness Family

Dr. Harris Keeps You Informed

## Car Seats & Your Child's Safety

Any parent with a newborn to preschooler knows about car seats; a necessary evil that comes with any automobile trip. Whether it's a short jaunt to the grocery store or a three hour drive to visit relatives, the child restraint system is required by law for your child's safety. But how safe is it?

### **NHTSA Recommendations**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) states that for your child's safety you should consider the following guidelines:

- Infants (birth to one year of age or weighing at least 22 pounds) require a rear-facing convertible seat
- Toddlers (over one year of age and weighing 20-40 pounds) need a forward-facing convertible seat
- Young Children (ages 4 – 8 years, unless at least 4'8" tall and weighing more than 40 pounds) need a seat belt-positioning booster seat in a forward-facing seat position

Any children ages 12 and younger should ride in the backseat at all times.

### **Additional Features**

The pursuit of the perfect car seat has created a variety of systems, checks and balances in the hope of making our children's safety a little more secure.

LATCH, an acronym for the "Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children" system is one of the latest attempts to decrease the problems related to improperly installed car seats.

As of September of 2000, all new automobiles (except convertibles) are required to have a special attachment that secures the tether strap found on most new child restraint systems. The purpose of the adjustable straps is to secure the seat to the rear window shelf, floor or back of the vehicle seat. The strap will keep the top of the car seat from moving too far forward, reducing the possibility of head injuries during crashes.

In September of 2002, a second feature was required: a lower attachment bar with a matching feature on a car seat (buckle, hook or connector) that snaps onto the lower anchor bar of the vehicle.

You would think that with all of these new safety measures being taken and car seat laws in every state, children would be completely safe during an auto accident; you would be wrong.

### **Still Number One**

Despite all the latest changes to car seat safety, injuries caused by motor vehicle collisions remain the leading cause of death in children 2 to 14. It is also the leading cause of disabling injuries in that age group.

Just as a seat belt is meant to restrain an adult during an auto accident, the car seat has the same purpose;



*"Have your child's carseat checked to be sure it is properly installed."*

they are called child restraint systems not child life preservers for that very reason. Parents mistakenly believe that if their child is in a car seat that they are immune from injury during a motor vehicle collision; when, in reality, the purpose of the car seat is only to lessen the degree of risk to the child.

### **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, not realizing that their child may be suffering the same discomfort.

Why is this? Generally, if a child doesn't complain of pain, it never occurs to a pediatrician or parent that any injury was sustained during the collision. 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.

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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.

### ***The SUV and Your Child***

The Sports Utility Vehicle is growing in popularity, and, partially due to their large size, they're becoming the newest, latest and greatest family car. It may be that parents believe because SUVs are bigger, that they're safer. *Pediatrics* magazine recently published a study that would prove this theory wrong.

Researchers considered a sample of 3,922 child occupants, ages 0-15, who suffered severe injuries in auto accidents comparing the injuries of those in passenger cars with those who were riding in SUVs. Severe injuries included but were not limited to:

- Concussions and other brain injuries
- Spinal cord injuries
- Facial fractures and lacerations
- Internal organ injuries
- Extremity fractures and
- Scalp lacerations

Among all the children in the study, those who were properly restrained were 75% less likely to be injured; whereas those who were in the front seat were 106% more likely to be seriously injured. In both vehicle types, children exposed to a passenger airbag were 370% more likely to be seriously injured; and rollover crashes increased the risk of injury by 229%.

While these numbers may seem average, the real shock came when the rollover crash factor was more thoroughly explored. In any type of auto accident, SUVs are four times more likely to roll over than any other passenger car, and a roll over crash increases the likelihood of serious injury by 229%. Risk of serious injury caused in an SUV increased an average of 2400% for the child that is not properly restrained; with that risk being as high as 9253%.

Despite the fact that the car is bigger, heavier and may feel like a tank, the increased tendency to roll after impact means that an SUV actually increases the risk of serious childhood injury.

### ***The Safer Car Seat***

Despite all the best intentions, there is no perfect car seat, safety seat or child restraint system because they all require installation. The NHTSA reports that more than 80% of all car seats are improperly installed and, when properly installed, they reduce the risk of childhood mortality by 54% when compared to a child riding completely unrestrained.

Your Doctor of Chiropractic is dedicated to your entire family's overall wellness and encourages you to call **866-SEAT-CHECK** or visit **[www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)** to find a seat-inspection facility near you.

### ***In Summary***

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.

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*Dear Parent,*

*Dr. Harris is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care; with that dedication comes an understanding that an informed parent makes wise decisions for their child. Take a moment today to discuss any concerns you may have with your Family Wellness Chiropractor.*

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