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Car Seat Challenge Test

Your infant will be having a Car Seat Challenge Test. This 90-minute test is done in the nursery at least 1 to 2 days before your baby is discharged from the hospital.

The Car Seat Challenge is given to all infants who:

- Are premature (born before 37 weeks gestation).
- Have a birth weight of less than 5 lbs. 8 ounces.

The test is done to see if:

- Your baby has any breathing problems while in a car seat.
- Certain car seat safeguards need to be put in place (special padding, head supports or limits on travel time, etc.).

This test may also be done if it is recommended by your baby's doctor.

Before the Test

If a standard car seat is appropriate for the infant's size, your baby's own car seat is used for the test. So it is important to **fully assemble** the car seat **before** bringing it to the hospital. The car seat needs to be at the hospital the day before your baby goes home.

During the Test

The nurse will apply 3 small patches (electrodes) to your baby's chest. Then the patches are connected to a heart and breathing monitor by small wires.

Next, a small sensor is placed on your baby's foot or hand. This sensor checks your baby's oxygen (O₂) level. After the nurse records the monitor readings, the parent or the nurse will put the baby in the car seat and secure the straps.

Over the next 90 minutes, the nurse will closely watch your baby and record the monitor readings. Should your baby have breathing problems while in the car seat, the nurse will reposition the baby. In some cases, the test may be stopped.

After the Test

The nurse will place the baby in the bassinet and the heart monitor and sensor are removed. The nurse will tell you the results of the test.

If your baby has any breathing problems during the test:

- The nurse will contact your baby's doctor.
- Your baby will be closely monitored in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.
- The car seat challenge test will be repeated in 12 to 24 hours.

Keep in Mind

During the first few months of life, even babies who did well during the test may have breathing problems while in a car seat.

- If possible, an adult should be in the rear seat next to the infant to observe the baby closely for any breathing problems or skin color changes. If these are noted, reposition the baby's head or awaken the baby.
- Some babies are not strong enough to keep their heads upright. Proper positioning of your infant in a car seat is important to reduce the risk of breathing problems.
- It is suggested that parents limit the time a newborn baby is in a car seat. If you are traveling longer than an hour, ask your doctor if it is OK for your baby.
- Always follow the guidelines that come with your infant car seat.

Resources

We encourage all parents to use the services of a certified car seat technician to learn how to install the car seat correctly.

For more information on car seat safety, contact:

- The Buckle Up Program at Lurie Children's Hospital provides car seat checks free of charge. Checks are by appointment only every Tuesday. Call 312.227.7087 to reserve a spot.
- Your local fire and police departments.
- Go to www.seatcheck.org, or call 1.866.732.8243 to find car seat inspection locations.
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at www.nhtsa.gov (equipment).
- www.safercar.gov (car seats) or call 1.888.327.4236.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Neonatal and Post-partum Nursing