

## Car Seat Challenge Test

All infants who are born before 37 weeks of gestation or have a birth weight of less than 5 pounds 8 ounces will have a car seat challenge test. Your baby's pediatrician may also recommend this test.

*The car seat  
needs to be at  
the hospital the  
day before your  
baby goes home.*

The test can show if your baby has breathing problems while in a car seat. It can identify certain car seat safeguards that your baby may need. These may include special padding, head supports or limits on travel time.

We do the test in the nursery at least 1 to 2 days before your baby is discharged from the hospital. It takes 90 minutes.

### Before the test

If a standard car seat is the right choice for your baby's size, your baby's own car seat will be used for the test. It is important to put the car seat together **before** you bring 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. Small wires will connect the patches to your baby's heart and breathing monitor.

Next, the nurse will place a small sensor on your baby's foot or hand. This sensor checks your baby's oxygen level. After the nurse records the monitor readings, you 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. If your baby has trouble breathing while in the car seat, the nurse will reposition the baby. In some cases, they may stop the test.

### After the test

The nurse will place the baby in the bassinet. They will remove the heart monitor and sensor. 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 physician.
- We will closely monitor your baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.
- We will repeat the car seat challenge test 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 sit in the back seat next to the infant. This lets you watch the baby closely for any breathing problems or skin color changes. If this happens to your baby, reposition their head or wake them up.
- Some babies are not strong enough to keep their heads upright. Positioning your baby in a car seat the right way can reduce the risk of breathing problems.
- Limit the amount of time your newborn baby spends in a car seat. If you are traveling longer than an hour, ask your physician 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. They can teach you 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 at no cost. To schedule an appointment, call 312.227.4711 (TTY: 711) or send an email to [carseats@luriechildrens.org](mailto:carseats@luriechildrens.org).
- Your local fire and police departments.
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:
  - Go to [nhtsa.gov/equipment](https://www.nhtsa.gov/equipment) or call 888.327.4236 to learn about choosing the right seat, installing it correctly and keeping your child safe. You can find an inspection station near you.