

Car seat challenge

Information for patients, parents and guardians

As part of the preparations for going home from hospital, your baby needs to have a car seat challenge test. This factsheet explains the reasons for this and what is involved. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your baby's healthcare team.

What is a car seat challenge?

The car seat challenge is a test to help decide whether or not it is safe for your baby to be in a car seat.

Car seats are essential for safe travel. However, research has shown that being placed in a car seat can cause reduced blood oxygen levels in some babies. Therefore, it is important to check that your baby is able to travel in a car seat safely, and/or if any modifications need to be made.

Your baby will need a car seat challenge test if they:

- were born at less than 36 weeks gestation
- are going home on oxygen
- have congenital heart disease or any other condition that could affect their ability to tolerate time in a car seat
- were born outside of their local hospital due to medical reasons and it will take more than one hour to travel to their home postcode.

How is the test completed?

We will usually ask you to bring in your car seat 3 to 5 days before the planned date of discharge.

The car seat challenge is completed during the day, approximately 30 to 60 minutes after a feed. Ideally you will be present so you can practice using your car seat.

A saturation monitor will be applied to measure your baby's heart rate and oxygen levels. We will record these observations for 10 to 15 minutes whilst your baby is in their cot, and then for a further one hour in the car seat.

What if my baby does not pass the car seat challenge?

If your baby's heart rate drops below 80 beats per minute, or their oxygen saturation levels drop below 90% for 10 seconds or more, the test has not been passed.

If your baby shows signs of increased work of breathing or apnoea (a pause in breathing), the test would be discontinued. An unsuccessful car seat challenge may be an indicator that your baby is not yet ready for discharge.

Alternatively, if the problem was thought to be due to poor positioning, the car seat may be modified, either by adjusting the harness and/or adding an insert to improve the support.

We will then repeat the car seat challenge in 24 to 48 hours.

After two unsuccessful tests, we may suggest a medical review to ensure your baby is ready for discharge. Occasionally a lie-flat car seat may be suggested as a safer alternative.

Car seat safety – top tips

- Ensure you know how to use your car seat before its first use - follow the manufacturer's instructions. Video demonstrations can often be viewed on their website.
- Thick clothes such as snow suits should not be worn whilst in the car seat as the harness will be less effective and your baby may get too hot.
- Your baby's head should be in a 'neutral' position (looking straight ahead, not slumped).
- Ensure the harness is not twisted or too loose. You should only be able to put two fingers between the harness and your baby's chest.
- Ensure the top of the harness is level with, or just below your baby's shoulders.
- Do not leave your baby unsupervised in a car seat.
- Ideally, a second adult should travel in the back of the car with the baby, and a mirror should be used so the driver can see the baby at all times.
- Car seats should only be used for travel in a car.
- It is recommended that travel be minimised in the first few months of age, keeping journeys to a maximum of 30 minutes.
- During longer journeys, take breaks every 30 minutes, and remove your baby from the car seat.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns contact the neonatal home team on **07766 994816**

Further information

For further information please contact your car seat supplier or visit the following websites:

www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules

www.childcarseats.org.uk/choosing-using/

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

www.rospa.com/road-safety/advice/vehicles/car-seats

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