

# Cleaning Car Seats with Safety in Mind

## Read Car Seat Manufacturer's Instructions

- ◆ Each car seat manufacturer has specific instructions on how to clean their car seat. Follow the cleaning instructions provided by the manufacturer.

## Maintain Car Seat Between Cleanings

- ◆ Routinely vacuum crumbs or food and wipe down the car seat. Spot cleaning will make it easier to maintain the car seat and it may be less likely to take the car seat apart for cleaning.



## Wash as Directed

Use mild soap and the water temperature as directed by the car seat manufacturer's instructions when washing the car seat pad or parts. Do NOT use bleach or strong cleaners.

- ◆ **Car Seat Pad:** Confirm whether the pad is machine washable or must be cleaned by hand washing.
  - ◆ Plan on air drying the pad, unless the instructions say using the dryer is permitted.
- ◆ **Car Seat Harness:** Many harnesses cannot be immersed in water.
  - ◆ Manufacturers recommend wiping the harness with mild soap and water to clean and allowing the harness to air dry.
- ◆ **Car Seat Shell:** Clean with mild soap and water and dry with a soft cloth.
  - ◆ Take care not to damage any labels when cleaning the car seat.
- ◆ **Never** use an iron or heat on the car seat pads or harnesses. The heat can damage the fibers.



## Evaluate the Buckle

Check the crotch buckle and clean as needed to ensure proper latching. Make sure the buckle is functioning properly and is free of debris. To clean:

- ◆ Remove the buckle from the car seat.
- ◆ Thoroughly rinse the buckle with warm water.
  - ◆ Do Not submerge the buckle webbing into the water.
  - ◆ Do Not soak the buckle or use soap, household detergents, solvents, or lubricants.
- ◆ Remove the buckle from the water and shake out any excess water. Allow the buckle to air dry.
- ◆ Test the buckle by fastening and unfastening the buckle tongues on both sides of the buckle until you hear a click. If you do not hear a click for each buckle tongue you may need to repeat the cleaning process.
- ◆ Never use oil lubricants or chemicals in the buckle as it may change the way the buckle functions.



## Allow Time for the Cleaning the Car Seat

- ◆ Proper cleaning takes time. Make sure you allow time for the car seat padding, buckle and all the cleaned parts to fully dry. Air drying may take several hours or even a day. Make other arrangements for children who need to be transported during this time.
- ◆ Consider ordering replacement parts for any extra dirty messes when cleaning the part is not enough. Manufacturers offer replacement parts for their car seats. Contact customer service to determine if a replacement part is available for the car seat. Be sure to have the model number and manufacture date available when ordering a replacement part.

## Reassemble the Car Seat Correctly



- ◆ Carefully follow the car seat instructions to assemble the car seat correctly.
- ◆ Take pictures of the car seat parts and harness assembly before taking the car seat apart. The pictures will serve as a guide as you reassemble the car seat.
- ◆ Make sure the harness is not twisted.
- ◆ Pull on the harness system to make sure it is securely installed.
- ◆ Follow the car seat instructions to correctly insert the buckle through the shell and pad of the car seat.

## Use Caution when Using Extra Products

- ◆ Children can be messy in the car. Many parents purchase seat protector pads to place between the vehicle seat and the car seat to protect the vehicle leather or upholstery.
- ◆ Read and follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions for guidance on protecting vehicle seats.
- ◆ Some car seat manufacturers have approved the use of select seat pads, protectors, and/or towels.
- ◆ Contact the car seat manufacturer to see if they allow the use of products that did not come with their car seat.



# Car Seat Expiration and Replacement Information

**Car Seat Manufacturer's Expiration Date:** Each car seat manufacturer determines the life span for their car seats. Most manufacturers suggest replacing a car seat at 6 years from the date of manufacture, although some car seats have a life span up to 10 years. Always read and follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions to determine the recommended life span of a car seat. Expiration dates are a way for car seat manufacturers to provide guidance on the expected "useful" life of their car seat. The car seat expiration date is based on the date of manufacture, not the date of purchase or use. Discontinue use of the car seat once the expiration date is reached. The date of manufacture can be found on the label that provides the model number. The sticker may be found on the back, side, or bottom of the car seat. **Some child restraint manufacturers are placing expiration dates molded into the plastic shell of the car seat.** The expiration date may be provided as a month and year or in number of years from the date of manufacture.



**Design Innovation and Improved Safety Standards:** A car seat that is passed down from friends and family may appear to be in great condition, but older car seats may not have newer lifesaving technologies and recently updated safety standards. For example, before 2002, car seats were not equipped with Lower Anchor and Tethers for Children (LATCH). Now they are a standard feature on car seats. Expiration dates ensure older car seats are removed from use and children are protected by car seats designed with current safety features and meet the most current standards.

**Material Breakdown From Use:** Car seats are often exposed to extreme temperatures in hot and cold cars. Over time, the car seat shell can develop hairline fractures from exposure to the heat and cold, and the harness webbing can become frayed from use. The car seat breakdown may not be visible, but the strength of the car seat can become compromised over time.



**Recalls:** An older car seat may have been part of a recall, and you may not have been notified.

### Register Your Car Seat for Recall and Safety Notices

Register car seats to ensure you will be notified about recalls and guided through the repair process. Car seats can be registered:

- ◆ Online at the car seat manufacturer's website, using the model number and manufacture date that is found on a sticker located on the back or bottom of the car seat.

OR

- ◆ By filling out the registration card that came with the car seat. The registration card has the car seat's information. Mail the card; no postage is required.

OR

- ◆ Online at [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents). Select "Car Seat & Booster Seats" and then "Registration". Complete and submit the online form.

**Replacement Parts:** As designs change, manufacturers may not maintain an inventory of older car seat parts. These parts may not be available beyond the expiration date.

**Car Seat Involved in a Crash:** Always follow the car seat manufacturer's guidance about replacing a car seat if you are involved in a crash. The forces in a collision can sometimes cause unseen damage. This hidden damage may keep the car seat from properly protecting the child in future crashes. Some car seat manufacturers recommend that a car seat be replaced after a crash of any severity, even a minor crash. Some car seat manufacturers follow the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommendations.

NHTSA recommends that child safety seats be replaced following a moderate or severe crash in order to ensure a continued high level of crash protection for child passengers. NHTSA does not recommend that a car seat be replaced following a minor crash.

**Minor crashes are those that meet ALL of the following criteria:**

- ◆ The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site.
- ◆ The vehicle door nearest the safety seat was undamaged.
- ◆ There were no injuries to any of the vehicle occupants.
- ◆ The air bags (if present) did not deploy.
- ◆ There is no visible damage to the safety seat.

