

Seatbelts and pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about wearing a seatbelt when pregnant.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. It is not intended as advice for your individual circumstances. Ask your health care provider for more information.

Should you wear a seatbelt when you are pregnant?

Yes, it is important that you always wear a seatbelt when driving or as a passenger, including when you are pregnant. You are required by law to wear a seatbelt when traveling in a car unless you have a medical reason and a certificate from a doctor. Not wearing a seatbelt is a leading cause of car crash death. You are eight times more likely to die in a car crash if you are not wearing a seat belt.

Will wearing a seatbelt harm your baby?

Wearing a seatbelt correctly is safer for you and your baby than traveling without it. If you are in a car crash, a seatbelt may reduce your risk of injury. Your body and the amniotic fluid around your baby cushions and helps keep your baby safe. That means the best way to protect your growing baby is to protect yourself by wearing a seatbelt.

What sort of seatbelt should you wear?

It is always safer for you and your baby to use a three point seatbelt (lap-sash) with a lap-belt and a shoulder strap (sash). However, a lap-belt on its own is safer than no seatbelt at all if you are involved in a car crash.

How can you wear the seatbelt so that it is comfortable and still safe?

Some pregnant women may find wearing a seatbelt uncomfortable. The safest and most comfortable way to correctly wear a seatbelt is to:

- Sit back in the seat so that if you are in a car crash your forward movement is reduced and the air bag is able to inflate correctly

- Place the lap-belt under your baby as low as possible. It should sit over the upper thighs/pelvis and not across your baby
- If you have a thick jumper or coat on remove these if they are making the seatbelt slide up
- Never wear the lap-belt across or above your baby
- Position the shoulder strap (sash) over your collar bone and snugly between your breasts
- Never wear the shoulder strap under your arm or behind your back
- Adjust the angle of the seatbelt and seat if necessary so that the seatbelt does not cut across your neck
- Make sure the seatbelt lies flat, is not twisted and fits firmly
- Don't use a cushion between your body and the seatbelt
- If you are driving adjust your steering wheel so that it is aimed up and at least 25 cm away from your abdomen so that if the air bag opens it is directed toward your chest not your baby
- Adjust the seat so that you are as far away from the steering wheel and dash board as possible and can still reach the pedals comfortably
- Adjust your rear vision and side mirrors if required

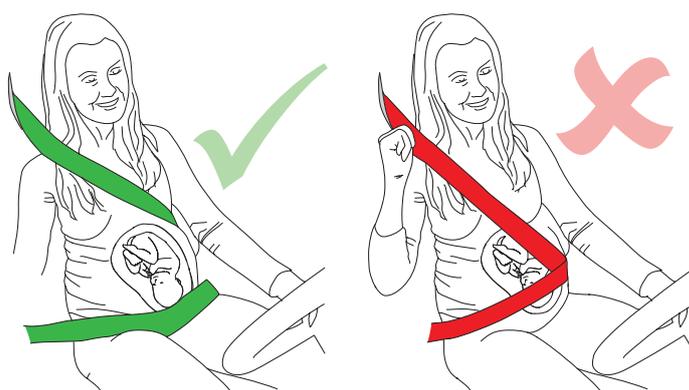


Figure 1. Adjust your seatbelt. Lap-belt low over hips, shoulder strap between breasts and above baby

Will the air bag harm your baby?

The risk of injury to you and your baby from an air bag that opens in a car crash is low. Air bags are designed to supplement your seatbelt—they do not replace the need to wear your seatbelt correctly. In fact, an air bag can be dangerous if it opens and you're not securely buckled up.

Remember always ensure you are at least 25 cm away from the seat in front or steering wheel and dashboard.

What should you do if you are in a car crash?

See your health care provider right away if you are in a car crash, even if it was only minor and you are feeling fine. It doesn't matter how many weeks pregnant you are, it is important to check that both you and your baby are unharmed.

If you know your blood type is Rhesus negative be sure to mention this as you may need to have an anti-D injection.

If you experience any contractions, leakage of blood or fluid or abdominal pain call your health care provider.

Safe driving tips:

- Don't sit in the car for long periods of time, especially as your pregnancy progresses
- Don't travel for more than 5 to 6 hours a day
- If making a long journey stop every 90 minutes to reduce the chance of your legs swelling, cramping or developing blood clots
- Stop at a rest area or service station and walk around and do some simple stretches such as extending your leg (heel first) and gently flexing your foot to stretch your calf muscles
- When you are sitting rotate your ankles and wiggle your toes
- Using a foam wedge or cushion in the small of your back may help prevent backache

Comfort, support and information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline 1800 882 436 (free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline