

# Women's Health Resource Library

## Surprising Dangers of Infant Car Seats

By Chris Kuhni, WHNP

There are several important reasons car seats should not be removed from the car, at least not on a regular basis. Let's focus on baby first. Babies need human touch. There are numerous studies detailing the ominous and tragic outcomes of babies in orphanages. Years ago, orphaned babies were fed and kept clean but without human touch, they died. That is how critically important touch is for infants. So why are we carrying our babies around in a piece of molded plastic?

Parents and babies bond better with more touch. Babies are easier to sooth the more they are touched. They cry less and sleep more because they are more contented. Touch is calming for both babies and parents. (Who doesn't want a calm baby?) Babies who receive more touch grow up to be more well-adjusted and loving. Babies deprived of touch can have multiple behavioral problems, and can grow up to be aggressive and even violent.

Parents who use soft carriers or baby back-packs seem to be more responsive to babies' cues; the infant-parent relationship is strengthened. Parent who transport their babies in car seats on a regular basis often "park" the car seat alongside furniture on the floor. The baby ends up being ignored as adults interact and the baby is forgotten.

### A False Sense of Security?

Parents can also have a false sense of security, leaving baby unattended in a car seat on a table or in a shopping cart. Babies can be surprisingly strong when they decide they want to move or roll and this leads to countless accidents.

Babies consistently left in car seats are also missing out on important "tummy time". Since sleeping on the tummy increases the risk for SIDs, babies need awake time on their tummy to help strengthen their neck and back.

And babies kept in a car seat can end up with flat spots on the back of the head. Tummy time provides the positional balance that can help prevent flat spots.

## The Car Seat Handbag

The other danger posed by infant car seats is to parents and caregivers. Standard car seats can weigh 7 to 10 pounds or more. Add baby and you can be tugging, lifting and carrying twenty plus pounds all over town on a daily basis. So parents, often moms, end up with strains and pains in the wrists, arms, shoulders, neck and back. Repeatedly pulling the car seat out of the car and pushing it back in, multiple times a day, over and over again... well, you get the picture. Medical office visits for muscle strains are common in this population.

The other issue with lugging that seat around is that the handles often do not get the same attention in the inspection process as the body of the car seat. There are thousands of accidents every year involving broken handles on infant car seats.

Busy parents will claim they don't want to waken a sleeping baby and it is "easier" to just remove the whole car seat, baby and all. In this case, convenience just comes at too high a price. Parents should be encouraged to look for safe alternatives even before the baby is born and avoid falling into the habit of the car seat "handbag".

Parents need to stay healthy to care for their growing families. And babies need the loving touch of their parents.

Check out the safety ratings of soft structured carriers, slings and back-packs. And leave the car seat where it belongs. In the car.

*About Chris Kuhni, WHNP*

*Christine Kuhni works at the Milbridge Medical Center, Milbridge, ME.*

*She is a Women's Health Nurse Practitioner and Certified Menopause Clinician. She is the Executive Director of the Women's Health Resource Library ([www.whrl.org](http://www.whrl.org)).*