

## Safe Travel: Airbags and Exercise Saucers

### Airbags:

There is considerable confusion about the safety and use of airbags. **The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** answers some questions regarding the safety of Automobile Airbags.

Q. Can I disable the airbags in my vehicle?

A. Federal law prohibits disabling airbags. Exemptions may be granted in cases involving either a child in a rear-facing child seat who has a medical condition requiring close monitoring by the driver, or a vehicle that does not have any rear seat in which to install a child seat.

Q. Should I put a rear-facing infant seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag?

A. No. Under absolutely no circumstances should a rear-facing infant seat be placed in front of an air bag. There is an extremely high risk of severe injury or fatality in this situation and a child should never be subjected to this risk. The safest place for all children 12 and under is in the rear seat. If no rear seat is available in which to place a rear facing infant seat, and another mode of transportation is available, use of that alternative should be considered.

Q. Should I put a forward-facing child safety seat in the right front seat with an air bag? Will the child be safe if the airbag is deployed?

A. All children 12 and under should be placed in the rear seat. This is the safest place. If no option exists other than seating a young child in the front seat, several steps must be taken. First, the child needs to be properly restrained in the child seat. Second, the vehicle seat needs to be pushed all the way back, to maximize the distance between the child and the air bag.

Q. My child is too old for a child seat. Should I allow my child to ride in the front seat with an airbag.

A. Children 12 and under should be placed in the rear seat. If no other option exists, the following steps should be taken. First, the child needs to be properly restrained. This means, depending on the size of the child, you should use a booster seat plus a lap/shoulder belt, or a lap/shoulder belt alone for larger children. Second, the vehicle seat needs to be pushed all the way back to maximize the distance between the child and the airbag. Third, the child needs to be sitting with his/her back against the seat back, not wiggling around or leaning forward with as little slack as possible in the belt in order to minimize forward movement in a crash.

Airbags have saved over 1,700 lives as of November 1996. NHTSA recommends that everyone be properly restrained and that children ride in the rear seat of a vehicle.

### Exercise Saucers:

There is growing concern about the prolonged use of exercise saucers for young babies. Doctors and physical therapists warn that these devices can foster bad posture, weaken back and stomach muscles and delay walking. Teenagers, who had visited doctors for back problems, unanimously reported that they had used walkers as infants.

Another drawback to exercise saucers is that they inhibit learning. Babies learn very actively, so inhibiting their activity limits their learning ability. Newsweek magazine interviewed Peter Gorski, director of developmental research at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He describes them as "selfish props." Even exersaucer manufacturers recommend that children be placed in them for no more than 20 minutes per day. Babies need "tummy time" to develop back, neck abdominal and buttock muscles. The best place, Gorski says, is a "good, clean floor." "It's cheap, it's safe and you can get down there with them."