

Add-on products for car seats, booster seats and seat belts – Are they safe?

By Kirsten Coupland-Tardiff R.N., B.Sc.N.,
Ottawa Public Health



Add-on products, sometimes called “aftermarket products,” are products that are not supplied with the car seat or by the manufacturer of the car seat. Examples of these products include head support cushions (head huggers), sleeping or bunting bags, harness strap covers, attachable mirrors, plastic toys or mobiles and seat belt adjusters.

Items such as head support cushions and padded car seat bags can cause safety issues because they add extra bulky material behind your child, which in turn induces slack in the shoulder harness system. During a crash, slack in the harness system may result in your child being partially or fully ejected from the restraint system. The padded car seat bag may re-route the harness system because the slots in the car seat bag may not be in the same direction or width of the straps for the seat. This can cause slack in the harness system and lead to your child sliding out of the seat in the event of a collision.

Attachable mirrors, plastic toys and mobiles are all made with hard plastic material that could become loose and hit your child during a collision or sudden stop.

Seat belt adjusters are designed to pull the shoulder portion and the lap portion of the seat belt together so that the shoulder belt is not rubbing against your child’s face or neck. This results in the lap belt portion being adjusted too high over the soft abdominal area. In the event of a crash, the location of the lap belt could result in serious injury to your child’s internal organs. If the seat belt touches your child’s face or neck, he or she may need to use a booster seat.

Harness strap covers that are added on to the car seat can prevent the chest clip from being positioned at the armpit level. The chest clip is used to ensure that the straps hold your child in the seat in the event of a crash or a sudden stop. If the chest clip is too low, there is an increased risk of your child being ejected from his or her seat.

An alternative to using a head hugger is to place a rolled up receiving blanket around your baby's head. Instead of using a padded car seat bag it is recommended to dress your baby in a thin snowsuit and hat and place blankets over the baby to keep him warm.

Only use products that came with the car seat or booster seat at the time of purchase.

*For further information please visit: www.safekidscanada.ca
www.tc.gc.ca/eng/roadsafety/menu.htm*

This article originally appeared in the March 2010 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.