

## Manufacture & Expiration

Do car seats REALLY expire? Or is it just a ploy to get you to buy more car seats and spend more of your hard earned cash? Is your car seat going to spontaneously explode come its expiration date? Probably not, but "expiration dates" on car seats are NOT something that should be ignored.

Most people are unaware that child restraints have a limited usable life span, after which time they are best destroyed as they may be unsafe. Many car seat manufacturers state a maximum car seat life span in the manual or a "do not use after" date stamped in to the plastic of the seat. For some seats the life span may be as short as 5 years or as long as 10. If you're unsure, see the car seat life expectancy list or call the manufacturer and ask.

A manufacture date refers to the date that the product was completed at the factory, usually this will mean when the actual plastic of the seat was manufactured. This date must be printed on the product itself, it can usually be found stamped on to the seat plastic, or on a sticker on the restraint.

The date of manufacture (DOM) is needed to help determine if the seat should be replaced because it's too old i.e. past its expiry date, to determine if the car seat has been recalled or to order any replacement parts if needed. It is absolutely vital to be sure of the seats brand, model, model number and date of manufacture.

Why do seats have expiration dates?

Within the last decade, most car seat manufacturers have adopted the practice of putting "expiration" or "do not use after" dates on their car seats. "This was begun in response to infant deaths from air bags. The companies realized that they had millions of products in use that said nothing about the danger to a rear-facing child. The concern became one that "best practice" and regulations change over time, so that child restraint becomes "obsolete" and less effective than a new product, much the same way that medicines may change or become less effective after some time has passed." (source: CPSTE)

In addition, after about 10 years, a seat may not have all its parts, instructions, stickers (they may have peeled off) nor have the important warning features found on later models. Life spans start from the day the seat was manufactured, even if it was in storage for most of this time, the expiry date still stands. They do not start from date of purchase.

What about the deterioration of seats?

Another important concern is that after a seats expiration date, or after 10 years, the seat is likely to have deteriorated through hot, cold, over-dry, moist or damp conditions, regular use (or misuse) and general wear and tear. This means that because some of your seats components may have degraded for whatever reason, your seat may be unsafe. This is why most manufacturers recommend that the use of a child restraint be discontinued after 5-10 years (different manufacturers have different recommendations) and the seat be destroyed.

Over time when exposed to the weather extremes in cars, the plastic of a restraint breaks down. Extreme heats (which cars reach in summer) can make plastic pliable (easily bent; flexible; supple; soft). Extreme colds can make soft plastics hard. It contracts and makes the plastic brittle. When plastic becomes brittle it can break apart easier then it should be

able to, in which case the seat may be unsafe to use and not work as intended in an accident. The same is true for most other plastic products.

In conclusion, over time the plastic in your restraint will change. The hot and cold extremes may cause splits in the plastic structure of the seat and may make it perform poorly in a vehicle accident. The deterioration in a seat is not always easily recognisable, nor is it always visible to the naked eye, there can be damage that your eyes just can not see.

Plastic degradation aside, it is also common for the harnesses and fabric covers on older car seats to become susceptible to mould (generally through poor storage conditions i.e. in a damp/moist environment) due to its properties. This can be dangerous as mould is a potential health hazard depending on its level of toxicity. Mould can cause allergies, infections, irritations, respiratory problems, digestive problems and even problems with the nervous system. Children are more susceptible to adverse side effects from mould due to their developing state. Apart from the detrimental effects mould can cause to the health of a child, mould 'attacks' and has the ability to 'eat' and stain the materials it grows on i.e. car seat harnesses/straps and fabric covers.

How has car seat technology changed and advanced over the past couple of decades?

Gone are the days of the lovely "T-Bar" (T-Shield) car seat. With the couple of straps over the shoulders and it's big plastic/rubber "T" shaped piece at the front that "clicked" in to the seat between the legs. While the "cream of the crop" in their own day, they've now been replaced by seats with 5 or 6 point harnesses.

Safety experts have expressed concern about how safe they really were. Reasons include the fact that quite often they cannot be tightened sufficiently and there were also concerns that this type of restraint put excessive load on the crotch of a child (therefore with risk of injury to the genitalia area). There as also a concern of possible injury to the head, chest and throat of a child when coming in to contact with the shield.

While we're on the topic of technology changing &ndash; Tether straps - the long length of webbing/belt at the back of the car seat with one hook on the end. While it has been mandatory for seats that conform to the Australian and New Zealand Standard to have upper tether straps for quite some time, this only became mandatory for forward-facing American restraints since 1999. European restraints however have yet to follow suit.

Tether straps are used to anchor the top of the seat to the vehicle securely. They act as a backup should the seatbelt fail (which admittedly is a rare occurrence) however they also limit head excursion (the distance the head travels in an impact). Some older seats may not have tether straps.

Another example, remember 17 years ago when your parents brought back that squishy, spongy foam booster (see above) from Aussie for your little brother to use? Believe it or not, they're now considered EXTREMELY dangerous. Yet still, people use them. Although the foam itself is not so likely to 'deteriorate', in an accident the forces combined with the weight of the child compress the spongy foam of the seat which can cause one or more of several things to happen. Ejection - Submerging under the seatbelt or flying out of the seat all together. Abdominal injuries? Maybe a ruptured liver or spleen, broken spinal cord. Head or brain injury? Windshields, windows and doors do not play nicely with skulls. If you have such a seat, please do not use it as a booster seat in the car. If you can't bare to part with it - use it as a comfy kids seat for the lounge.

What to do if you are in possession of an expired or unsafe child restraint

If you have an expired or unsafe restraint you wish to dispose of, ring your local Plunket Centre and ask if they will be

able to take the seat to be destroyed for you. If you do decide to take your seat to Plunket to be destroyed, a small donation would be greatly appreciated to put towards dumping fees. If you do not want to take it to Plunket, you can dispose of it yourself.

Before you dispose of the seat you should:

- Remove the harness straps and cut them up
- Remove and cut up the cover and/or any foam padding
- Break the shell in half or so much so that there is no way that it can possibly be 'repaired' and used again

You should dispose of your destroyed restraint at a rubbish dump, do not illegally dump a seat somewhere that it shouldn't be i.e. in a residential area. Some dumps may require you to pay a dumping fee so alternatively you may dispose of it at an inorganic collection. Again though, make sure you follow the above steps as people often rummage through the collections or rubbish dumps taking out old restraints to use for their own children or sell for profit to someone unaware of its dangers.

Videos:

Video  
Link  
Ten year old car seat  
HERE

Car seat life expectancy list:

Click on name of seat make for more information

Brand Life Span  
Safety Standard  
Baby Trend  
6 years USFMVSS213 + "S" mark

Babylove10 years  
ASNZS 1754 Babywise  
10 years  
ASNZS 1754

Brio 10 years ECE R44-04 + Swedish T approval  
Century (USA)  
6 years  
USFMVSS213 + "S" mark  
Century (AUS)  
10 years  
ASNZS 1754  
Cosco  
5-7 years  
USFMVSS213 + "S" mark  
Dorel  
5-7 years  
USFMVSS213 + "S" mark  
Evenflo6 years  
USFMVSS213 + "S" mark  
Go Safe  
10 years  
ASNZS 1754  
Graco

5 years  
ECE R44-04  
HiPod  
10 years  
ASNZS 1754  
IGC  
10 years ASNZS 1754  
Mother's Choice  
10 years ASNZS 1754

Nania - Car Seat Speciality 7 years USFMVSS213 + "S" mark  
Recaro  
10 years  
ECE R44-04 Safety 1st  
6 years  
USFMVSS213 + "S" mark

Safe-n-Sound 10 years ASNZS 1754 Vita 10 years  
ASNZS 1754

Britax  
- Safe-n-Sound  
- HiPod  
- Babylove

Statement which can be found in the car seat user manual:

"It is recommended not to use child restraints older than 10 years as the protection in an accident may be reduced."

Where to possibly find the manufacture dates on your child restraint:

The manufacture date for your child restraint should be able to be found stamped in to the back of the seat in the form of clocks (see below) or on the side of the seat, printed on a sticker (also see below).

Click on images to see larger pictures {gallery}sns{/gallery} Q&A:Q - Does the 10 year "life expectancy" from date of manufacture apply to the polystyrene booster seats? A - Yes. Response from Britax Childcare Australia Ltd Customer Services - "The life expectancy for both [plastic AND polystyrene] is 10 years from date of manufacture." Britax (USA)

Statement from Britax (USA) Childcare:

"Britax recommends that the use of a child restraint be discontinued if the restraint is older than six years of age or has been in a severe crash. After six years, technology has changed, components degrade from the environment (depending on how and where stored), parts get lost or installed incorrectly, or instructions and labels may not be available or not legible. The restraint may be unsafe and should be destroyed"

Link: <http://www.britaxusa.net/support/faq.aspx> under "General Questions" and "How long can my child safety seat be used?"

Nania - Car Seat Speciality

Statement which can be found on Page 17 of the car seat user manual:  
"DO NOT use after 7 years from date of manufacture on label"

Evenflo

Statement from Evenflo Child Restraints (available on [www.evenflo.com](http://www.evenflo.com)):

"We recommend a 6 year life span from the date of manufacture for car seats because: a) Older child restraints may have been used by multiple families and instructions and labels may be missing. b) The history of older car seats is not known, as they could have passed through unrelated parties. Thus, the seat could have been in an accident, abused or misused in a way that could cause hidden damage. c) Second-hand owners would not be directly reachable in the event of a recall. d) As regulations change, older seats may not meet current safety standards, such as the enhanced air bag warnings started in May 1997."

Where to possibly find the manufacture and expiration dates on your child restraint:

The manufacture date for your child restraint may be found stamped in to the back of the seat in the form of clocks (see below) or on the side of the seat, printed on a sticker (also see below).

Click on images to see larger pictures

{gallery}evenflo{/gallery}

Q&A:

Q - Do car seats made before the "Do not use after XXXX" dates were introduced have a 10 year life expectancy?

A - No, they do not have a 10 year "life" they have a 6 year life. Response from Evenflo Senior ParentLink Representative - "Thank you for your inquiry regarding car seats. We recommend 6 years. Thank you again for contacting Evenflo. We appreciate the time you took to email." The new recommendations supersede the old, always follow the manufacturers current recommendations, for Evenflo this is 6 years from date of manufacture. .

\_\_\_Q - Do the "life spans" on Evenflo restraints start from the day the seat was manufactured or the day it was purchased?

A - No, they do not start from the day they were purchased, the clock starts ticking from the day the seat is manufactured. Response from Evenflo Senior ParentLink Representative - "Thank you for your inquiry regarding your Evenflo car seat. The expiry date goes from the date of manufacture. I apologize for the confusion. Please let us know if you have any further questions. Thank you again for contacting Evenflo. We appreciate the time you took to email."

\_\_\_Q - I have an Evenflo Apollo convertible booster/Evenflo Portabout Infant Capsule that says it was manufactured in 2004 [example only] but the expiration date molded in to the plastic on the bottom says "Do not use after December 31 2008 [example only]." Why is this?

A - Response from Evenflo Senior ParentLink Representative - "Some units recently sold in New Zealand were built from unused materials that were engraved with an expiry date that reflected when some of the parts were made, but not the year that the units were assembled." The stamped expiration date does reflect when the pieces were manufactured, but the date of manufacture sticker on the seats reflect when they were actually assembled (all the pieces put together to make a car seat).

Both the Apollo and Portabout were moulded for a large USA retailer but the bulk of the order was cancelled leaving evenflo with tens of thousands of seats. Seats with the "Do not use after December 31 20XX" engraved date may reflect a 2002 to 2004 mould date. Because the order was cancelled, the seats sat in storage until they were offered to customers outside of the USA, New Zealand being one of them.

A few "letters" are circulating stating that it is fine to use the car seats from six or seven years from date of purchase, however many professionals, organisations and parents argue otherwise and do not believe in this practice. Letter #1, Letter #2 & Letter #3 .

Furthermore, many seats have had their original "Manufacture Dates" taken off and replaced with stickers that reflect approximately the month the seat was sold - not when it was actually manufactured (pictures below). Some restraints have also had the "Do not use after..." dates covered with stickers of "expiration" dates reflecting six or seven years approximately from when the seat was purchased, not when it was manufactured. Additionally some restraints have had their "Do not use after..." dates melted with a hot melt gun to get rid of the original dates and new "expiration" dates scratched in instead. Other restraints have also had their manufacture date clocks and expiration dates scratched off . Evenflo has not given consent for their seats to be modified in such a way [with a hot melt gun].

Having "incorrect" manufacture dates can make it difficult to ensure your seat has not been part of a recall for a safety defect [Note: to my knowledge they have not been recalled for a safety defect] and it can also make it difficult or near impossible for you to register your seat so that you can be notified of a recall if one ever does happen to occur. It can also make it difficult to buy replacement pieces for your seat.

Click on images to see larger pictures {gallery}evenflo2{/gallery}

The Porabout was discontinued in 2005. The Apollo was discontinued in 2002. More info available in the Colour Pictorial Guide to Child Restraints 2007 .

Evenflo believe that there is no risk of deterioration if the seat is used past the date imprinted on the shell. They state that they adopted the practice of placing expiration dates on child restraints in an effort to discourage the resale or extended reuse of units that may have been involved in a motor vehicle collision, are missing parts, have damaged or broken parts, etc. And that the use of secondhand car seats with a history unknown to the next purchaser may present unnecessary risk to a child.

However, many parents and experts believe that the plastic in the seat does start deteriorating from the day it is made although not as rapidly as if it were being used every day. Many other manufacturers state that they have adopted the practice of putting "expiration dates" on their seats because of technology changing, component degradation, parts get lost or installed incorrectly, or instructions and labels may not be available or not legible. And that restraint may be unsafe and should be destroyed once it's time is "up."

So far as I am aware at this very moment (September 2007) it is not illegal to use these seats past their "Do not use after December 31 20XX" date however it is not advised. Currently there is no recall on these seats being sold for refunds however the modification of the seats using a hot melt gun is currently being questioned. Right now, the decision of whether you continue to use the seat or not is up to you.

Q - Can my seat be "re-certified" so I can keep using it past it's expiration date?

A - Absolutely not. There are no testing facilities in New Zealand nor any organisations that can legally or morally "re-certify" seats. Once the time is up, that's it. Be wary of anyone or any organisations that say they can "re-certify" child restraints.

IGC - In Good Care

- GoSafe
- IGC
- Babywise

- Mother's Choice
- Bertini

10 years from date of manufacture. No more information available at present.

Phil & Teds

To be confirmed.

Baby Trend

Q&A:

Q - What is the life span of Baby Trend car seats?

A - Response from Baby Trend Customer Service Representative "All car seats are good for up to 6 years, if they have been in a car accident they do need to be replaced. This information was provided by our safety technician."

Dorel Juvenile Group USA

- Safety 1st
- Cosco
- Eddie Bauer

Where to possibly find the manufacture and expiration dates on your child restraint:

The manufacture date for your child restraint should be able to be found stamped in to the back of the seat in the form of clocks (see below) or on the side of the seat, printed on a sticker (also see below).

Click on images to see larger pictures {gallery}dorel{/gallery}

Q&A:

Q - What is the life expectancy for Cosco, Eddie Bauer and Safety 1st Child Restraints?

A - Response from DJG USA Consumer Relations "Hello - The general recommendation is that you replace a child restraint after it is six years old. Thank you."

—  
Q - Can you confirm that the "life spans" of car seats start from the date of manufacture and NOT from the date the seat was purchased in store?

A - Response from DJG USA Consumer Relations "Dear Bonnie, Yes that is correct. Thank you."

Century (USA)

Statement from Century Child Restraints (Also known as Graco as they have merged in to one):  
"Car seats have a suggested life span of six years. With the changes in legislation, auto mobiles and technology, we suggest that a car seat be replaced upon its sixth year from the date of manufacture."

Link: [http://www.gracobaby.com/customerservice/faq\\_category.aspx?catID=1#144](http://www.gracobaby.com/customerservice/faq_category.aspx?catID=1#144)

Q&A:

Q - What is the life span of the Century child restraints?

A - Response from Graco Consumer Services "Thank you for contacting Graco. The expiration date is 6 years from the date of manufacture on all car seats."  
Century (AUS)10 years from date of manufacture. No more information available at present.

Peg Perego

Q&A:

Q - What is the expiry dates/life expectancies for the American Peg Perego Infant Car Seats?

A - Response from Peg Perego Customer Services Email Support - "Most car seat experts recommend that you not use a car seat that is more than 5 years old. In fact manufacturers are considering putting a "stale date" on car seats. The theory is that as plastic ages, it becomes brittle so it may not perform correctly in a serious crash. There also could be hidden damage that is not detected."

Reference:

Five-Point Harness or Shield - Choosing a safer seat

<http://cpsafety.com/articles/fivepointshield.aspx>