



## Car Travel with Preschoolers

Travelling to new places offers both parents and children exciting opportunities. It gives the entire family an opportunity to relax and enjoy each other's company. It can, however, also present problems – five minutes in the car can seem like hours to the weary traveller who wants to know, "Are we there yet?" Planning and preparation go a long way to making car travel enjoyable.

With the appropriate toys, games and activities, an extended car trip can be a time for your child to learn and a chance for both of you to play.

### General Tips

1. First and foremost, keep your child safe. Children under 18 kg (40 lbs) must be in regulation car seats. Instructions for installation and use should be followed precisely. Regulation booster seats are recommended for children between 18 and 27 kg (40-60 lbs). Children under 12 years old should always sit in the back seat. Seatbelts for all passengers must be worn at all times. If you are renting a car, you will still need a car seat. Most car rental agencies provide them. If not, many Canadian cities have outlets where you can rent a child car seat. Ask your travel agent.
2. Doors should always be locked and, if windows are open, heads, arms and hands should be kept inside.
3. Some children are prone to motion sickness. Keep the car cool and well ventilated. Do not smoke in the car. Ask your pharmacist to recommend medication to relieve nausea if necessary. Have plastic bags available in case your child vomits. Reading while travelling may increase motion sickness. If your child is on medication, be sure to carry enough in the car to last the length of your car trip and extra in case of spills and/or traffic delays. You should also carry a first-aid kit in the car, including a thermometer, liquid acetaminophen (for fevers), bandaids, gauze and tape.
4. Bring along enough tissues, diapers, baby wipes, etc., to last the length of the trip.
5. Carry nutritious snacks that are low in sugar. This will keep your children happy and calm. Suggestions include graham crackers, Cheerios, cheese, bananas, grapes and orange sections.
6. The Canadian climate can make travel uncomfortable: too hot in summer and too cold in winter. Blinds are available for the back and side windows that help to keep the sun out of your child's eyes. They are available at many department and hardware stores, in various sizes and priced reasonably. During the winter season, carry a blanket in the car. This will keep all passengers warm in case of snowstorm delays.
7. Start driving early in the day and don't drive for too long. Young children also need frequent stops for stretching and running.

### Boredom Relievers

Boredom and restlessness can be overcome with games, toys and books. Sharp-edged, hard or heavy toys should not be carried on car trips. Do not store toys on the rear window ledge where they could become "flying missiles" if you need to stop suddenly.

Pack a travel kit with such items as new books, crayons, colouring books, finger puppets, magnetic marking boards and sticker books.

### Suggested Games

- Window Wonders (1-2 years): Look out the window and talk about what you see. Make animal noises, car noises, etc. Let the child wave at other cars.
- Simon Says (2 and up): Parent moves a body part (e.g. hands on head) and says, Simon says, "put your hands on your head." The child imitates. This gets stiff muscles moving.
- Counting Games (3 and up): Count anything and everything that you see. e.g., blue cars, trucks.
- I Spy (3 and up): "I spy with my little eye something that is..." Describe something you see and let the children guess. Then let them choose something for you to guess.
- Storytelling: Let each person in the car tell one sentence of a story. An adult can start and each person adds a new sentence. (e.g., "Once upon a time there was a great big green giant who...") Vary the difficulty with the age of the child.
- Entertainment: Bring along a variety of tapes or CDs for your car or for the child's personal walkman/discman. These activities are very relaxing for children. Borrow book tapes from the public library. Bring a blank tape for children to record their own stories and songs. Rent a DVD player to play movies while you drive.

### Additional Resources

The Canadian Automobile Association is an excellent resource for tips on travelling, road maps and accommodation for families. Check your telephone directory or visit [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca).

Transport Canada offers child safety information at [www.tc.gc.ca](http://www.tc.gc.ca) or call 1-800-333-0371.

The Canadian Toy Testing Council ([www.toy-testing.org](http://www.toy-testing.org)) offers an annual toy report, assessing and rating toys for safety, durability, play value and suitability for travel. Contains additional suggestions for making travel with young children a pleasurable experience.