

## High chair safety basics



### Why high chair safety deserves attention

High chairs are designed to elevate a child into a feeding position, but elevation itself increases the consequences of a slip or tip-over. Young children have limited balance, limited ability to protect themselves in a fall, and an unpredictable tendency to lean, arch, twist, or try to climb. That combination makes a seemingly brief lapse in supervision enough to cause injury.

Injury prevention starts with treating the high chair as safety equipment, not just furniture. A good setup reduces the chance of tipping, sliding, or accidental ejection, but it cannot eliminate risk. The goal is to stack the odds in the child's favor by combining a sound product, correct restraint use, and close adult oversight.

### Choose a chair that is stable and compliant

A safer high chair should be sturdy, with a wide base and a design that resists tipping when a child shifts weight. The federal safety standard for high chairs, enforced for products manufactured or imported on or after June 19, 2019, includes requirements for stability, restraint systems, and warning labels. In practical terms, that means the chair should be engineered to stay

upright during normal use and to keep the child seated securely.

When comparing chairs, look for a freestanding model that feels solid when you press gently from different directions. Folding models should lock firmly in the open position. The tray should attach securely if the model uses one, and the seat should be deep enough to support a child without allowing them to slide forward easily. If the chair rocks, creaks, or feels uneven on the floor, do not assume it is safe enough for daily feeding.

### **Use the restraint system every time**

The restraint system is one of the most important parts of high chair safety. Straps are meant to keep a child from standing, sliding, or wriggling out of the seat while still allowing comfortable upright feeding. The exact design varies, but a secure harness should be snug enough that the child cannot climb out or lean far enough to tip the chair.

Use the restraints every single time, even during short meals or snacks. A child can move from seated to standing in seconds, and an adult may underestimate how quickly that transition happens. Make it a routine to buckle before the first bite, then check that the harness fits flat against the body and is not twisted. If the chair uses a crotch post, tray, or other positioning component as part of the restraint system, make sure it is in place according to the manufacturer's instructions.

### **Set up the feeding area to prevent tipping**

The location of the chair matters as much as the chair itself. Place it on a flat, stable surface and keep it away from counters, tables, walls, cords, and other objects a child might push against with their feet. A child who braces on a nearby surface can shift the center of gravity enough to make a chair rock or tip.

Keep the area around the chair clear. Avoid placing toys, loose utensils, bib clips, bags, or hot drinks within reach. These items can invite leaning, grabbing, or distraction. A clean feeding zone also reduces the chance that an adult will need to step away to remove an object during the meal. If the chair has wheels, lock them before use. If it folds, make sure the folding mechanism

is fully secured and cannot collapse unexpectedly.

### **Inspect the chair before each meal**

A quick pre-use inspection can catch problems before they become injuries. Look for cracks in the plastic, loose screws, worn straps, damaged buckles, or a tray that no longer locks firmly. Check the legs and frame for wobble, especially if the chair has been moved frequently or stored folded between uses. If the chair has fabric components, make sure they have not stretched to the point that the child sits too low or slips sideways.

Also think about age and wear. Chairs that were safe years ago may no longer be appropriate if parts are missing, replacement components are unavailable, or the manufacturer has issued a recall. If the product manual is available, review the assembly instructions and weight limits. If a replacement part is not an exact match, do not improvise with tape, cords, or makeshift fasteners. That kind of workaround can create a new hazard.

### **Why supervision is non-negotiable**

Even the best high chair is not a substitute for a supervising adult. Most preventable incidents happen during brief moments when someone turns away to answer a text, stir food, or reach for an item across the room. During meals, keep the child within your line of sight and within easy reach whenever possible.

Supervision also helps you notice early signs of unsafe behavior, such as standing, unbuckling, leaning too far forward, or trying to push the chair. If a child is restless or no longer safe in the chair, pause the meal and remove them rather than trying to finish while distracted. The safest approach is simple: if you cannot actively supervise, the child should not be in the high chair.

### **Special cases: hook-on chairs and shared spaces**

Hook-on high chairs can be convenient in restaurants or small homes, but they deserve extra caution because they depend on the strength and compatibility of the table or surface they attach to. Not every table is appropriate, and some

surfaces may flex, tip, or crack under load. Before use, confirm that the manufacturer's instructions match the table's design and that the chair is firmly attached without wobble.

Shared living spaces introduce additional risks. In homes with older siblings, pets, or frequent foot traffic, a high chair can be bumped or climbed on. Keep it in a predictable area and avoid positioning it where a child could be jarred by a door, cabinet, or moving chair. If the chair is used by multiple caregivers, make sure everyone knows how to buckle it correctly and how to lock the folding or tray mechanism.