

SEAT BELTS

Did you know that seat belts are the most effective means of reducing fatalities and serious injuries in a traffic crash? It's true. In fact, seat belts save over 10,000 lives in America every year.

The sad fact is that thousands of people still die in traffic crashes annually. When a vehicle is involved in a crash, the passengers inside the vehicle maintain the vehicle's original speed at the moment of impact. When the vehicle finally comes to a complete stop, unbelted passengers slam into the steering wheel, windshield or another part of the vehicle's interior.

Seat belts are your best protection in a crash. They are designed so that the strongest areas of your body absorb the forces in a crash. Those are the areas along the bones of your hips, shoulders and chest. The belts keep you in place so that your head, face and chest are less likely to strike the windshield, dashboard, other vehicle interiors or other passengers. They also keep you from being thrown out of a vehicle.

The Top Four Reasons Why You Should Wear Your Seat Belt

- Seat belts can save your life in a crash.
- Seat belts can reduce your risk of a serious injury in a crash.
- Thousands of the people who die in car crashes each year might still be alive if they had been wearing their seat belts.
- It's easy. It only takes three seconds.

What's the right way to wear your safety belt? The lap belt or lap portion of the lap/shoulder belt should be adjusted so that it is low and snug across the pelvis/lap area—never across the stomach. The shoulder belt should cross the chest and collarbone and be snug. The belt should never cross the front of the face or be placed behind your back.

The adult lap and shoulder belt will fit you properly when you can sit with your back against the vehicle seatback cushion, with knees bent over the vehicle seat edge and feet on the floor. So to wear seat belts you must be at least 4' 8" tall and weigh about 80 pounds. If the lap and shoulder belt do not fit you right now, you should be using a belt-positioning booster seat. A booster seat raises your sitting height, which enables the lap and shoulder belt to fit you properly.

How Seat Belts Can Stop You in a Crash

One tenth of a second after impact the motor vehicle comes to a stop. The unbelted occupant slams into the car's interior. Immediately after the unbelted occupant stops moving, his internal organs collide with each other and also with skeletal systems. To allow the occupant to come to a more gradual stop, all the stopping distance must be used. Holding you in your seat with a safety belt allows you to stop as the car is stopping, thereby enabling you to "ride down" the crash.

During a crash, safety belts distribute the forces of rapid deceleration over larger and stronger parts of the body such as the chest, hips, and shoulders. Additionally, the safety belt actually stretches slightly to slow down and to increase its stopping distance. The head, face and chest are also less likely to strike the steering wheel, windshield, dashboard, or the car's interior frame.

People wearing safety belts are not thrown into another person or ejected from the vehicle. Also, the safety belt helps belted drivers maintain control of the car by keeping them in the driver's seat. This increases the chance of preventing a second crash.

Seat Belts and Air Bags

You still must buckle your seat belt even if you're riding in a car with an air bag. Air bags can cause injuries or even death when people are too close at time of deployment. Everyone should sit at least 10 inches away from where the air bag is stored.

Young children who are riding in child safety seats or older children who are riding in booster seats should ride in the back seat, furthest away from an air bag. This is why children 12 years of age and under should always be properly buckled up in the back seat!

Front seat driver and passenger side air bags only work in frontal crashes, so if your car is hit on the side or rolls over, the air bag will not protect you—only your seat belt, when worn properly, can do that!

Using Seat Belts with Child Safety Seats

Securing newborns and toddlers in child safety seats is known to reduce chance of serious injury in a crash. Each child under the age of 12 should be buckled in her or his appropriate seat: the vehicle's back seat, or a child safety seat in the back of the car. Newborns should be placed in rear-facing car seats in the back seat.