



# Proper Seat Belt Use

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Some 40,000 people die each year in car crashes, the leading cause of death for people age 3 through 34. Seat belts can prevent fatalities in about half of these crashes. In 2008, during daytime hours, 45 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were not wearing their seat belts. During nighttime hours in 2008, 64 percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were not wearing their seat belts. If you know this and are still not wearing a seat belt, you may need to ask yourself why not. But first, let's look at what happens when a car crashes.

## **The Human Collision**

Imagine running as fast as you can - into a wall. You'd expect to get pretty banged up. Do you think you could stop yourself if the wall suddenly appeared when you were two feet away from it? This is exactly the situation you face when the front of your car hits something at only 15 miles an hour. The car stops in the first tenth of a second, but you keep on at the same rate you were going in the car until something stops you such as the steering wheel, dashboard or windshield. At 30 mph you hit "the wall" four times as hard as you would at 15 mph. Or to put it another way, with the same impact you would feel as if you fell three stories. A properly worn seat belt keeps that second collision - the human collision - from happening.

"Properly worn" means with both straps snugly fitted to transfer the impact of the collision to the parts of your body that can take it - your hipbones and shoulder bones. With just the shoulder strap on, you can still slide out from under it and be strangled, while the lap belt alone doesn't keep your face from hitting the steering wheel.

## **What's Your Reason For Not Wearing One?**

- "I won't be in a crash: I'm a good driver." Your good driving record will certainly help you avoid crashes. But even if you're a good driver, a bad driver may still hit you.
- "I'll just brace myself." Even if you had the split-second timing to do this, the force of the impact would shatter the arm or leg you used to brace yourself.
- "I'm afraid the belt will trap me in the car." Statistically, the best place to be during a crash is in your car. If you're thrown out of the car, you're 25 times more likely to die. And if you need to get out of the car in a hurry - as in a crash involving fire or submergence - you can get out a lot faster if you have not been knocked unconscious inside your car.
- "They're uncomfortable." Actually, modern seat belts can be made so comfortable that you may wonder if they really work. Most of them give when you move - a device locks them in place only when the car stops suddenly. You can put a little bit of slack in most belts simply by pulling on the shoulder strap. Others come with comfort clips, which hold the belt in a slightly slackened position. If the belt won't fit around you, you can get a belt extender at most car dealerships.
- "I don't need a belt - I've got an airbag." Lucky you! An air bag increases the effectiveness of a seat belt by 40 percent. But air bags were never meant to be used in place of seat belts.



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## Using Seat Belts

Before you drive away, always fasten your seat belt and make sure all your passengers are using seat belts or child restraints. Also, remember to lock the vehicle's doors and turn on the childproof locks if children are in the vehicle.

Studies have shown that if you are in a crash while using seat belts, your chances of being hurt or killed are greatly reduced. Seat belts will move with you and lock up if a crash occurs. They keep you from being thrown from the vehicle and against parts inside of your vehicle. In addition to protecting you from injury as a driver, seat belts help you keep control of the vehicle. If you are struck from the side or make a quick turn, the force could push you sideways and therefore you cannot steer the vehicle if you are not behind the wheel. In many states it is illegal to drive or to be a front-seat passenger, without wearing seat belts. Seatbelts may be required under graduated driver licensing for drivers or all occupants of the vehicle.

Wear a seat belt all the time, not just on long trips or high-speed highways. More than half of the crashes that cause injury or death happen at speeds less than 40 mph and within 25 miles from home.

It is important to wear the seat belt correctly.

- A shoulder harness is worn across the shoulder and chest with minimal, if any slack. The shoulder harness should **not** be worn under the arm or behind the back. Wearing the harness the wrong way could cause serious internal injuries in a crash.
- The lap belt should be adjusted so that it is snug and lies low across your hips after fastening. If you have an automatic shoulder belt, be sure to buckle your lap belt as well. Otherwise, in a collision you could slide out of the belt and be hurt or killed.



Correct

Incorrect

Source: ADTSEA

- You should be seated upright with your back against the seat and feet on the floor. Improper seating positions, such as slouching or resting one's feet on the dashboard can result in reduced effectiveness of the vehicle's restraint system and possibly result in injury.
- Seat belts should be worn even if the vehicle is equipped with air bags. While air bags are good protection against hitting the steering wheel, dashboard or windshield, they do not protect you if you are hit from the side or rear or if the vehicle rolls over. In addition, an air bag will not keep you behind the wheel in these situations.
- The law requires that all children under the age of 12 must be secured in the rear seat and wear appropriate seat restraints while the vehicle is in motion.

Information for this fact sheet was derived from:

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AAMVA Model Driver Manual