

CAR CRASH **SURVIVAL**

A man with a beard, wearing a grey sweater and blue jeans, stands in profile next to a white car that has been severely damaged in a crash. The car's front end is crumpled, and the hood is bent upwards. The man has his hand to his chin in a thoughtful or distressed pose. The background is a blurred urban setting.

BASIC GUIDE TO STAYING ALIVE

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Driving Safe is not Enough: How to Attenuate the Crush

Using cell phones while driving, road rage, and driving under the influence of some drug all serve to make the roads more dangerous than they have to be. No matter how confident you may be of your driving skills, or those you ride with, there is likely to be a time when you are involved in a car accident.

Knowing what to do prior to an imminent crash can save your life and also mean the difference between minor injuries and ones that leave you in pain or disabled for the rest of your life.

While you may not have much time to act, these simple things can give you the best chance of survival.

Wear Your Seat Belt Properly

Over the years, more than a few people have railed against using seat belts because they feel the government should not tell them how to live their lives. While I am not a big fan of “nanny state” thinking, there is a time when common sense must prevail. As a matter of simplicity, the laws of physics aren't going to stop working just because you don't like government interference.

In this case, “a body in motion tends to stay in motion”. If you aren't wearing a seat belt at the time of a crash, your body will continue to be propelled in the direction of motion even though the vehicle has stopped.

No matter whether you go through the windshield, or you wind up impaled by items in the path of your motion, your injuries can go from minor to fatal.

Still doubting that a seat belt can save you? Here are some other things a seat belt will do for you in the seconds prior to a crash and afterward:

- Prior to a crash, it is possible that the driver is going to take some kind of evasive action. No matter whether this entails sharp braking, hard steering, or rapid acceleration, you will not be able to stop your body from being thrown around. The last thing you want to do is be thrown against the driver's arm, hands or other body parts needed for controlling the vehicle.
- If you are the driver, the seat belt will keep you in the driver seat and prevent most disruptions to your posture. Even a slight adjustment to your posture can break your attention and also cause your head (and eyes) to be move away from the impending crash. Simply put, the seat belt helps keep your body in an optimal position before the crash, which can buy you that valuable part of a second that you need for evasive action.
- Modern vehicles are made with fortified passenger areas that will cave in as little as possible in a moderate to bad crash. The passenger cabin is often called “room to live”, because if you can stay in that tiny area of the vehicle even during impact,

there is a chance you will survive. On the other hand, if you are thrown from the vehicle, you will wind up under the car and be killed on impact. A seat belt will give you some bruises, may break a few bones, and even leave you with internal injuries, but at least you will be alive and have a chance to heal.

Unfortunately, seat belts will not work as well if you don't wear them properly. Always make sure that the lower part of the belt fits snugly across your hip bones. It should not cut into your abdomen or be so loose that it crosses the lower pubic area. You should feel the belt resting mainly on your hip bones.

Remember, in a crash the fabric of the seat belt can and will cut like a razor.

Ideally, the largest surface area of the belt should impact your hip bones so that internal organs are protected. In a similar fashion, the shoulder part of the seat belt should sit in front on the boniest part of your shoulder.

Do not let the belt rub against your neck, sit under your arms, or get too close to your throat.

What a Driver Should Do

As soon as you realize a crash is going to happen, there is no point to trying to outrun the event or stop the vehicle before it happens.

Use the Steering Wheel to Minimize Damage

You can still use the steering wheel and the crumple zones of the vehicle to minimize damage from the crash as much as possible. Depending on the situation, you may start out with as much as 4 seconds. Count on at least $\frac{3}{4}$ second before you actually see the vehicle move in the direction you turned the wheel.

Do not give up hope of minimizing the impact in this fraction of a second because the driving force of your vehicle is already changing. Surviving an imminent car crash has a lot to do with how you maneuver the vehicle in those final seconds.

Basically, any move that will put you away from hitting the passenger side of the other vehicle, or a large surface are will be of help to everyone. If you can, always aim for the tail lights or headlights so that you just clip the vehicle instead of having a much larger area of impact.

Keep Both Hands on the Wheel

Insofar as protecting yourself from damage in the crash, there are some techniques you can use. First, always drive with your hands, wrists, and forearms in alignment. A bent or limp wrist can easily be shoved against the steering wheel and broken. In addition, a limp wrist also gives you less support and control in those seconds when you need it most.

At the time of impact, your hands should be sitting solidly on the steering wheel. Try to tense from your hands to your shoulders so that there is minimal motion. Keep the back of your head pushed into the headrest.

Whiplash can happen at speeds well under 12 mph, as can other serious to life threatening neck injuries. Keeping your body as stable as possible at the time of impact is the best way to reduce injury and also keep you in control of the vehicle.

When you have been driving for decades and feel comfortable in the vehicle, some bad habits can creep in.



For example, many drivers will drive with just one hand on the wheel, or hold the wheel in such a way that they do not have optimal steering range. It is best to keep your hands at the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions so that a deploying airbag does not push your hands into your face.

This position also enables you to turn the steering wheel without your hands crossing over each other, or having to get into position to achieve a fast maneuver. Remember,

you will have less than four seconds to stop the crash. The $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ second it takes to get your hands in the proper position to grip and then turn the wheel can cost your life.

Be Careful About Using the Horn

Some people will tell you that hitting the horn just before a crash is very important legally, and can help prevent a crash. Over the years, I have changed my mind on this topic based on my observations on what other drivers do.

Before cell phones become a common item in cars, the sound of the horn did, in fact, pull needed attention to a dangerous situation. It is my contention that hitting the horn when a crash is imminent can have a startling effect on distracted drivers that can spell disaster.

Consider what you do when you are sleeping soundly and someone throws a bucket of water in your face. This is how a distracted driver's mind works. Their primary focus and main involvement revolves around talking on the phone or sending a text.

At best, if you hit the horn, it will take them time to respond as they shift gears away from the phone and back to driving. At worst, a distracted driver may freeze up or do something else unpredictable.

In fact, if they are angry or having some other negative emotion caused by the conversation they are having, they may just ram you or do something else to make the situation worse.

5 Tips for the Front Passenger Seat

Technically speaking, there is very little you can do to prevent the crash let alone mitigate its impact. But there are things you can do to mitigate injury to yourself and others:

- Never ride with someone that has the cell phone or any device other than the GPS or traffic radio on in the car. Do not count on the fact that you are watching the road and may be able to alert the driver to the fact that a crash is imminent. This warning can take at least 2 seconds to get through to the driver. In addition, if the driver already sees the situation, screaming or trying to give some other alert can disrupt their attention and prevent them from taking evasive action as quickly as possible.
- Never ride with someone that has been drinking, using drugs, appears tired, is sick, or has a record of refusing to take appropriate rest breaks. While you may see the crash coming, the driver is still in control of the wheel and the brakes. Shoving the steering wheel is not something most front passengers can do effectively, let alone fast enough to avoid the crash. Quite frankly, it is more of a movie stunt that will do more harm than good, especially if the driver panics and slams the brake when they should be accelerating, or worse yet, shoves the wheel in the opposite direction of your motion.
- Do not eat food, consume beverages, or smoke while sitting in the passenger seat. While there are many passenger (and drivers) that feel perfectly safe cruising on the thruway while chomping on burgers, soda, coffee, fries, or pie, it is a truly dangerous habit. At the time of impact, you can choke on any food or beverage in your mouth. In addition, if you are smoking, the lit cigarette can touch just about anything and start a fire inside the passenger cabin. This situation will be made even worse if the crash is bad enough to cause gasoline or volatile fumes to leak into the passenger cabin.
- As a front passenger, properly belted into your seat, the best thing you can do is push your body into the seat and make as much contact as possible. The larger the surface area, the more room there is for the impact force to diffuse.



- There is considerable controversy over whether or not you should relax or brace your muscles prior to a crash. In the era before seat belts, it was more than likely best to relax because there was nothing at all to restrain your body from going in the direction of travel. Today, the confining aspect of the seat belt means that tensing your muscles gives you a chance to protect joints and muscles from being damaged by the impact. While many people point to the “drunk drivers go limp and suffer no damage” idea, the fact remains drunk drivers are injured and die in car accidents all the time. Tensing your body, especially your neck, might mitigate whip lash and reduce the risk of other injuries.

3 Safety Tips for the Back-Seat Passengers

If at all possible, try to choose the middle most seat in the back.

Excluding the increased safety associated with air bags and seat belts in the front of the vehicle, the middle back seat is the safest in the vehicle.

To make the most of this seat:



- Make sure that you are sitting up straight with your back against the seat. Your legs and feet should not be propped up or in a position where they can slam into your face or upper body.
- If there is a headrest in the back, the back of your head should be resting comfortably against it. Since riding in the back seat carries an increased risk of whiplash, head, and neck injuries, this is extremely important.
- Do not sleep or lay down in the back seat while it is in motion. No matter whether you are bored, have motion sickness that is made worse in the back seat, or some other problem, laying down can spell disaster at the time of impact. Aside from the fact that there is no way to wear the seat belt, your entire body will be thrown against the seats in front of you. If the direction of impact creates a sideways

motion, or the vehicle overturns, there is an increased risk you will be ejected from the vehicle.

To stay safe during a car crash, always wear your safety belt, and never ride with someone that can't or won't focus fully on driving and doing so safely. Tense your body as much as possible before the crash so that you aren't dealing with as much joint or muscle damage.

Since advice on this matter changes as technologies and mainstream driving habits change, stay up to date on emerging research in this area.



How to Get out of a Vehicle After a Crash

No matter whether you are the driver or passenger in a vehicle, a car accident can be a very traumatic experience. Even if the accident is minor, you may have hidden injuries, or you may become trapped in the vehicle. Or things could go worse and you might need to get out of the vehicle as quickly as possible.

While every accident is a little bit different, here are some basic things you can try, as well as the tools required to achieve your goal.

One Second After: Status Check

If you have ever been in an accident, there is no mistaking how those first seconds of awareness will feel. No matter whether you lose consciousness, are slightly dazed, or are

simply startled by the “bump” or “tap” that got your attention, the reality that you were in an accident can take time to settle in.

You have to realize that what you thought was a slight tap could have turned your vehicle upside down, or sent it crashing into a guardrail or worse. In these first few seconds to minutes, it is very important to stay as still as possible.

Before you move, try to take note of the following:

- The actual position of your body. Are you crumpled up, arms at odd angles, or is your head drooped over onto your chest?
- What do you see? Are you looking out the windshield, a side window, or is everything dark inside the vehicle?
- What do you smell? Is there a smell of gas in the air, dust, or something burning?
- What do you hear? Are there sounds of sirens, voices, or other sounds that might indicate someone is trying to get you out of the vehicle?

During those first few seconds, it is entirely possible you will not feel any pain. Do not be fooled by this. As your senses return and you become aware of the situation, you may feel a great deal of pain, along with coughing, dizziness, nausea, too hot, too cold, or even shaky. It can take seconds to minutes for this to subside.

If you move around too much or start thrashing around trying to escape, you can make wounds worse, or cause broken bones to scrape against each other. The key to this time is to stay still and make each movement count.

While you may be tempted to see if you can open the vehicle door, or try some other escape maneuver, the first thing you must do is make sure you are calm and composed. Take some deep breaths if you are able, and give yourself a chance to adjust to the shock of your situation.

Even if you smell gasoline or something burning, you must not panic. Get control of yourself and you will escape faster and with less effort than if you are in a panic.

7+ Tools that Save Your Life in a Car Crush



Surprisingly enough, there are just a few tools that you need to get yourself out of a wrecked vehicle. Most of them can (and should) be on your keychain. The rest should be part of your pocket EDC and always in your pocket in case you need them.

There is little, if any point in keeping these tools in your pocket book, the glove compartment, or any area of the vehicle where they may be thrown by the crash, or you are otherwise unable to reach.

Automobile Glass Window Breaker

Unless the accident is minor and does not involve damage to the doors or surrounding frame, it is likely you will not be able to get the doors open. Likewise, in modern vehicles, the electronic windows cannot simply be cranked down so you can climb out.

To add insult to injury, the entire electrical system may shut down for safety sake, which means you will not be able to simply turn the engine key (a bad idea in a wreck) and open the window the usual way. An automobile glass window breaker can be used to break the glass on the windshield, or any other window that you can get to.

Use the breaker near the edges, where the glass is weakest. You can get a 2 or 3 in one tool that includes a breaker and seat belt cutter that will fit on your keychain.

Seat Belt Cutter

If your vehicle has automatic seat belts, it is likely you will have the same problem you had with the windows. A seat belt cutter can cut through the belt so that you can move around.

Before using the seat belt cutter, it is very important to know what position and condition your body is in. If you are upside down, you will need to brace yourself on what was the inside roof of the vehicle so that you don't land on your head.

Cell Phone

While you should never talk or text on the phone when driving, it is a very important tool to have on hand after a crash. Before you move or try to extricate yourself from the vehicle, call for help.

If possible, purchase a small, durable phone that can be easily slipped into your pocket. Depending on where you live, even old style 2G phones that aren't on a cellular plan may still connect to 911 or the emergency service in your area. Aside from being durable, a “bar” style phone will fit more easily into your pocket than a smart phone.

Remember, in a crash, your entire weight may fall on the phone sitting in your pocket. It is best to have a phone that is durable enough to take this kind of treatment and still work. If a 2G phone will not work in your area, there are also more rugged 3G and 4G designs that can be used for this purpose.

Small Mirror

Can be used to signal that you are in the vehicle, and about where you are at. Stick a piece of tin foil on the back of your phone, or something else in your pocket, and then cover it with self-adhesive laminate to protect the surface.

You do not need a glass mirror or compact mirror to do the job of signaling. Just don't forget to replace the tin foil and laminate as they get scratched and worn from being carried.

Whistle

Also can be used to signal where you are, and that you are alive. In a multi-car crash with many victims, alerting rescuers to your presence is very important.

As with the seat belt cutter and window breaker, there are many cheap whistles that you can attach to your keychain.



2 Bandanna

Use this to cover your mouth and nose so that you inhale as little dust and debris as possible from the crash. In the first seconds after the crash, you are likely to breathe in some chemical residue from the airbag. Limit your exposure to this as much as possible. As soon as you realize an airbag has deployed, put the bandanna over your mouth and nose to avoid possible lung damage.

The bandanna will also help protect you from inhaling smoke from anything burning nearby. Even if your car has not caught fire, it is possible that another one might be burning; especially if it is a multi-car pileup. Keep a second bandanna in case you need to make a tourniquet or cover a wound.

Plastic Tie Downs

These can be used for a number of medical emergencies. Get the longest sized tie downs that you can find and simply fold them up and store in a mini drawstring pouch along with the rest of your pocket EDC gear.

Trigger Words and the Right Mindset

When you have only minutes to escape, it is best to know how to achieve calm in a matter of seconds. A few sessions of self-hypnosis and the choice of an activating keyword or image can give you this calm in any situation. Gain this tool and practice it often so that you have confidence in your ability to control yourself and think clearly.

What About Water and Food?

There is no question that you may feel very thirsty after a crash. While water, salt, and sugar are always good to carry, it may not be a good thing to consume them just after you are in a car crash. If you have abdominal injuries or other problems, consuming foods and beverages can make your situation much worse.

That being said, if you are extremely thirsty, you can put a few drops of water on a tissue and rinse your mouth with it. Just try to swallow as little as possible.

Likewise, taking pain killers or some other medication can be a problem, especially if the emergency crews need to give you some other medication to manage your injuries.

You should better wait for medical professionals to assess your condition and let them tell you what is safe to do at this stage.

The Big Decision: Should I Exit the Vehicle or Not?

Once you realize you are trapped in the vehicle, it is entirely normal to want to get out as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, if you are injured, this effort can make your situation even worse. Here are some situations where getting out of the vehicle may take priority over your condition:

- You smell gas or something else that is flammable. In this situation, there is no telling if the leaking gas or other chemicals are close enough to something hot or sparking that will set the vehicle on fire.
- You smell smoke or feel heat that indicates the vehicle may be burning, or something nearby has caught fire. Regardless of your injuries, getting out of this situation is absolutely necessary.
- The accident includes several other vehicles and it is likely that rescue groups are already overtaxed trying to work through the scene. Unless you make contact with the rescue teams and know help will get to you, it is best to stay in the vehicle.

- You are upside down or in another position that is unsustainable. Even if you cannot leave the car, regaining a more normal posture is very important.
- The vehicle is sinking in water. If you cannot get out of the vehicle, or cannot move very far before it sinks, at least try to get your head to the air pocket that will form at the opposite end of the heaviest part of the vehicle. Remember, once the pressure inside and outside the vehicle stabilizes, it is possible you will be able to open an undamaged door and escape. Otherwise, you will still have to break a window and try to get out that way.

Preparing to Leave the Vehicle

More than a few sources recommend gathering up your personal belongings before trying to exit the vehicle. While this may be somewhat appropriate advice if the crash is minor, I feel it can cost your life if there is a high risk of the vehicle catching fire or sinking.

If danger is that imminent, you will be best served by focusing on getting out of the seat belt and then out of the vehicle window if necessary. Remember, nothing is as important as your life, and that objects can all be replaced later on. Unless there is another person in the vehicle that also needs to escape, focus on your own wellbeing.

Getting Free of the Vehicle

After you have secured relatively dust free air, regained composure, called for help, and assessed your situation, and medical condition, it is time to see about getting out of the vehicle. Here are the basic steps to follow:

- If you have cuts or gashes, try to bind them up with plastic ties and cloth. Even a plastic bag will do if you have nothing else to stop the bleeding and prevent the wounds from picking up dust and dirt as you move.

- Cut yourself free of the seat belt if you cannot reach the release button or it does not work. Don't forget to brace yourself if you are upside down or in a position where you are going to fall once the belt is no longer holding you in place.
- See if you can open the vehicle door nearest to you. If you cannot and there is a risk of fire or sinking, then break the window nearest you in order to get out of the vehicle. In situations where there is less immediate risk, you can see if another door will open. When breaking a car window, it will produce very sharp glass shards. It is best to avoid having to break the window and try to crawl through all those bits of glass unless you have no other choice.

There is no such thing as a car accident that won't cause you to feel upset and distressed. In some cases, it will be absolutely necessary to try and escape from the vehicle if you want to remain alive. Having the proper tools on hand is every bit as important as knowing what to do.

On the other hand, injuries from car accidents are incredibly tricky. Just because you think you are ok, or don't have any broken bones, bruises and even fractures can show up hours and even days later.

From this perspective, it may be best to stay in the vehicle until medics can extricate you from the vehicle safely and with the least amount of further damage to your body. While this may be as hard to accept as the accident itself, sometimes staying in place is the best choice.

Resources

[Caring For The Wounded: 5 Techniques You Must Know!](#)

[18 Winter Car Hacks That Are Borderline Genius](#)

[Small Car Fixing On A Survival Budget](#)

[How To Set Up The “Emergency Ratio” for Your Car](#)

[How To Hide Your Car And Keep It Undetected](#)

[EMP Survival: An Essential List For Your Car’s Top Systems](#)