

Don't Sit on It—Wear It

There are a lot of reasons people won't wear seat belts, but there are also a lot of reasons that they should (even in vehicles equipped with air bags). This includes you if you don't already wear yours.

Choose Your Reasons

If you need a good reason to wear your seat belt, take your pick:

- You paid for it. (In fact, most cars have at least two seat belts; some have six. You paid for all of them; it's a waste of your money if they aren't used.)
- In an emergency, it holds you in place so you can control the car.
- In a crash, it keeps you from being thrown out of the car and hitting the pavement where you may be run over by another car or be crushed under your own.
- If you're a passenger in the back seat, the belt keeps you from being thrown forward, injuring yourself and those in the front seat.
- It can lessen fatigue. Many people feel more comfortable with the added support seat belts give them. This in turn aids alertness.
- Buckling the belt is a reminder that accidents can happen even to the most careful driver.
- Wearing your belt sets a good example for the rest of your family.

If you haven't been using your seat belts, take the time to inspect them. Make sure they're clean and working properly. Make and insist on a rule that everyone in your car wears a seat belt. Unrestrained passengers not only risk their own lives but also could injure others who are belted in.

Protection for Children

It's especially important that you safeguard children when they are in the car. They could be injured in normal driving by a sudden stop or a sharp turn. Small children need special protection. Because of a child's hip structure, a lap belt should not be used until the youngster is four years old and weighs at least 40 pounds. However, if no special restraint is available, it is far safer to use standard belts than to allow the child to ride loose. Don't strap two children into one belt. This makes proper fit impossible.

Holding a child in your arms is not safe either. In a collision, the child would fly out of your arms and be seriously injured. Not all car seats are safe, but there are crash-tested devices now on the market. So before buying a car seat or harness, check to make sure it's safe.

Whenever a child is riding with you, remember that the back seat is safer than the front, and the center of the vehicle is safer than the sides. The recommended protection for infants is to have the car seat facing the rear, for heavier toddlers, the seat faces front.

Remember, too, that seat belts aren't just for long trips. Two thirds of all accidents occur within 25 miles of home, and half of all fatal accidents occur at speeds under 40 mph.

Don't sit on your seat belt; wear it. Seat belts save lives!