

# Airbags Greatly Increase Your Odds

Should you always wear your seat belt, even for short trips? **YES!**

Should you disconnect your airbag? Probably not.

Airbags are a SUPPLEMENTAL Restraint System (SRS) designed to cushion the occupants as they move forward in a front-end collision. They are to be used *in addition to* seat belts, not instead of them. Because front airbags are NOT designed to deploy in a side, rear or low deceleration collisions, there are many accidents in which only the seat belt will protect you from more serious injury.

Each year, thousands of people's lives are saved by airbags. A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study of "real-world" crashes showed that 75 of every 100 people who would have suffered a serious head injury and 66 of every 100 people who would have suffered a serious chest injury were spared because they wore a seat belt and had airbags.

Extensive press coverage has recently been given to the deaths of children in airbag-related incidents. The great majority of those deaths were actually due to either failure to use proper restraints or being too close to the airbag when it deployed. NHTSA has confirmed that in the overwhelming majority of these incidents, the people were either totally unrestrained or were improperly restrained, thus allowing them to get too close to the airbag. Everyone in the vehicle should buckle-up with both lap and shoulder belts on every trip.

The airbag is not a soft, fluffy pillow. It deploys at up to 200 mph and could seriously injure or even kill an unbuckled child or adult who is too close to it or is thrown forward in a crash. For those who find seat and shoulder belts uncomfortable, make sure that the belts are fitted properly - under the abdomen and low across the hips. Many newer vehicles allow the shoulder belt height to be adjusted so that it crosses the collarbone and not the neck.

Drivers and passengers should position themselves at least ten inches (10") from the airbag. To do this:

1. Fasten your seat belt.
2. Move the seat as far as you can to the rear while still comfortably reaching the pedals.
3. Adjust the angle of the seat back, and raise the seat up as necessary.
4. Adjust the steering column downward so that it points toward your chest and not your head.

### Unbelted and Too Close



### Belted and at least 10" away



(illustrations courtesy of NHTSA)

Studies have shown that all but extremely short drivers (*i.e.* four feet, six inches or less) can safely drive an airbag-equipped vehicle. Check with your local dealer if you have any difficulty in properly adjusting seat belts or the steering column.

Infants in rear-facing child safety seats should **NEVER** be placed in the front seat and **every child** under the age of 12 should always ride in the back seat of any vehicle with a passenger side front airbag. If putting a child in the front seat is unavoidable (*e.g.* the child has a medical condition that requires frequent monitoring), he or she must be properly restrained with as little slack in the belt as possible *and* the seat must be pushed all the way back to maximize the distance between the child and the airbag.

Many newer vehicles now come equipped with side impact airbags. Since children should be seated in the rear, NHTSA has asked each manufacturer of such vehicles to ship them to dealers with the rear side airbags deactivated unless the manufacturer has determined that its side airbags pose no significant risk to children. Current owners of vehicles equipped with rear side airbags are asked to take them to the dealer to be deactivated if they are likely to carry children in the back seat.

Seat belts and airbags are both very important passive safety devices that save many lives every day. But if you don't use them properly, you may become just another statistic.

Just remember the ABC's:

**A**irbag  
**S**afety:  
**B**uckle  
**E**veryone  
**C**hildren in  
**B**ack

For additional information and resources, go to any of these web addresses.

More questions and answers about airbags:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/airbags/supplbag.qa.html>

Airbag on-off switches and other subjects:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/airbags/HwySafety/>

Most shorter drivers can eliminate risk without deactivation:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/airbags/HwySafety/>

Child transportation safety tips:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/newtips/index.html>

Buying a safer car for child passengers:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/safercar2001/contents.html>

Are you using the child set correctly?

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/useright/index.html>

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

<http://www.hwysafety.org/>

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