

What to Know About Seat Belt Injuries in Car Accidents

Houston lawyers who are ready to fight for your rights

Seatbelts save lives in [car accidents](#) every year. It's been proven again and again that seat belts work. That's why it's the law in Texas for drivers and passengers to wear them. And it's why the state participates in the annual ["Click It or Ticket"](#) campaign to get more people to buckle up.

But while seat belts do save lives, they can also leave people with significant injuries. The force of impact during a collision can result in a transfer of energy through the seat belt into the victim's body. These injuries can have a significant impact on the lives of victims.

Understanding how seat belts work

A car's motion and speed change quickly in a collision. This change in momentum activates the locking mechanism of the seat belt. The mechanism may be:

- Car-activated – There is a toothed ratchet gear attached to the seat belt spool. If the car stops suddenly, a weighted pendulum swings forward, pushing a mechanism into the gear. This prevents the spool from moving and the belt holds the person closely to the seat.
- Belt-activated – Any time there is a sudden jerk of the belt, a mechanism is activated that catches the toothed gear, preventing the spool from spinning.

In both systems, the belt is tightened at the moment of impact to prevent the belted person from being thrown against the inside of the car – or thrown out of the car and onto the ground.

What types of injuries are caused by seat belts?

Injuries caused by seat belts during a collision fall under the collective term "seat belt syndrome." During a crash, victims can suffer:

- Neck injuries – These include bone fractures in the cervical spine and damaged arteries caused by pressure from the seat belt pressing tightly on the neck.
- Chest injuries – When the seat belt presses against the chest area with great force, victims can suffer a fractured sternum (breaking the flat bone in front of the chest), pulmonary contusion (bruising of the lung), and fractured ribs.
- Abdominal injuries – Pressure on the abdominal area can result in damage to internal organs, such as the kidneys, liver, spleen, pancreas, intestines, or bowels.
- Soft tissue injuries – The force of the seat belt restraining the body can result in torn muscles, ligaments, or tendons in the shoulder or abdominal area.

Seat belt injury symptoms

When people are hurt by a seat belt during a crash, one of the symptoms is “seat belt sign.” This is a pattern of bruising and abrasions on the neck, shoulder, chest, and/or abdomen in the areas where the diagonal or horizontal strap of the belt was positioned.

Other symptoms of seat belt injuries can include:

- Pain or discomfort
- Bruising or swelling
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Difficulty breathing
- Bloating
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea or abnormal bowel movements
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Loss of motion

Some injuries can have delayed symptoms. That’s why it’s important to always get medical attention after a car accident.

Treating seat belt injuries

If you are in a car accident, a doctor will check your body for seat belt signs. Any noticeable bruising or abrasions could indicate there are other underlying injuries. Blood samples may be taken to look for signs of internal damage. Your airway, breathing, and circulation will be checked. An ultrasound of the lungs, heart, and other organs may be performed. A doctor may also want to get an imaging test, such as an X-ray, CT scan, or MRI.

Once your injuries are diagnosed, the type of treatment will depend on the type and severity of the injuries. You may be sent home to rest and given a prescription for pain or other medication. Other injuries are more serious and may involve surgery and hospitalization, as well as follow-up appointments.

Recovering financial compensation after a seat belt injury

If a negligent driver caused the accident that left you with seat belt injuries, you have the right to seek financial compensation for the damages you suffered. Examples of negligent behavior by a driver include speeding, texting, ignoring traffic signs or signals, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

But there are several obstacles to recovering compensation. Negligent drivers often deny doing anything wrong and may even blame you for what happened. Insurance companies routinely

try to minimize injuries or argue that they were pre-existing. They handle claims every day and have the advantage when you file a claim.

Do I need a lawyer for a seat belt injury?

If you have a significant injury, it is always in your best interests to have a lawyer on your side. An experienced car accident attorney will have a thorough knowledge of the tactics used by insurance companies to limit compensation and know how to craft effective legal strategies to counteract them.

An established law firm will have the resources to investigate your accident and prove negligence on the part of the other driver. This involves gathering evidence, carefully reviewing accident reports, interviewing witnesses, and consulting accident reconstruction experts, as needed.

An attorney will also determine the total damages you suffered and demand appropriate compensation. This includes compensation for current and future medical expenses related to your seat belt injuries, lost wages if you couldn't work, and other damages such as pain and suffering.

If you were hurt in a crash, it's important to consult an experienced Houston car accident attorney as soon as possible. While the Texas statute of limitations for taking legal action is generally two years from the date of your accident, waiting too long can make it more difficult to build a strong case for compensation. Contact [Smith & Hassler](#) to schedule a free consultation.