

Seatbelts Save Lives  
BY: Melissa Jeremiah, RN  
Director of Hoosier Uplands Home Health Care & Hospice

Although a seatbelt doesn't come with a 100% guarantee that you will walk away from an accident unharmed, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) seatbelt use saved 135,000 lives and prevented 3.8 million injuries between 1975 and 2000. The NHTSA goes on to state an additional 180,000 lives could have been saved and 1.4 million injuries could have been prevented, if the occupants would have been wearing their seatbelt. In 2002 motor vehicle accidents were the leading cause of death for every age 3 through 33. This article is written as a plea for everyone to buckle up, so your family does not have to hear that your death could have been prevented, if only you would have had on your seatbelt.

These statistics from the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute (ICJI) show the importance of seatbelt use:

The young driver age group, between the ages of 16 and 20, has the highest fatality rates nationally and the young occupant age group is also less likely to be protected by use of seatbelts.

1 of 3 young female drivers and 4 of 5 young male drivers involved in a fatal crash were not properly restrained, when seatbelt use was known.

None of the 9 young drivers killed in 2001 that were driving a pickup truck or van (full size) were properly restrained.

In Indiana's fatal crashes of 2002, 71.7% who were totally ejected from a vehicle were killed. Among fatal crashes where seatbelt use was known, 92% of people completely thrown from a vehicle were not wearing a seatbelt.

73% of passenger vehicle occupants involved in a fatal crash in 2003 who were wearing their seatbelt survived; of those not wearing their seatbelt only 42% survived.

A properly worn seatbelt means the straps fit snugly across your hipbones and shoulder bones, so the collision force is spread over these strong bones that can withstand the force of a collision. Improper use of a seatbelt can lead to serious injuries and death. Placing the lap belt across the abdomen can cause serious injuries to the abdominal organs, fractures of the lumbar spine and paralysis. Placing the shoulder belt underneath the arm or having the lap or shoulder belt loose allows excessive forward motion of the head, chest and body. This can cause injury from contact with portions of the vehicles interior. The shoulder belt can also pull upwards on the lap belt and cause abdominal injury, as described above. Please refer to your vehicle owner's manual for specific information to the seatbelt system installed in your vehicle. If something is not clear, contact your local vehicle dealer.

**Information from this article was obtained in part from the ICJI website, [www.in.gov/cji](http://www.in.gov/cji) and the Canadian Association of Road Safety Professionals, [www.carsp.ca](http://www.carsp.ca).**