

[IMAGE]

Want to Save a Life? Exercise Some Restraint

Although many automobile accidents are unavoidable, most of them are survivable, provided a person has taken the necessary precaution of "buckling up" first - wearing a seat belt or strapping your child into a car seat. In rare instances, however, a person wearing the proper restraints can be injured or even killed when an unrestrained passenger in the same car careens forward, backward or sideways into the restrained person during a crash.

A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* examined the effect an unrestrained person can have on the outcome of an otherwise "routine" automobile accident. In the study, researchers analyzed data on all car crashes on public roads in the U.S. between 1988 and 2000 that resulted in the death of at least one person, within 30 days of the accident. A variety of configurations were used in the analysis, including the number of occupants in the car, the sex and location of each occupant, seat position, whether an occupant was restrained, and whether the car was hit from the front, rear, or side.

Occupants who were restrained in the front seat of a car were 20 percent more likely to die with an unrestrained passenger behind them, compared to a restrained passenger. Similarly, a restrained passenger in the rear of the car was 22 percent more likely to be killed with an unrestrained occupant in front of them versus a restrained occupant. Similar results were seen in side-impact and angle crashes.

If the information above sounds confusing, the message isn't: If you want to increase your odds of surviving an automobile accident, make sure you - and everyone else who drives with you - use a seat belt, child-safety seat or other restraining device. It really could be a matter of life and death.

Reference:

Cummings P, Rivara FP. Car occupant death according to the restraint use of other occupants. A matched cohort study. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Jan. 21, 2004;291(3), pp. 343-349.

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