



Safety Belt Guidelines for All Ages



Here at the Child Safety Seat Resource Center our primary focus is child passenger safety. But who says adults couldn't use a reminder from time to time as well? We've all been witness to the friend, colleague or family member who misuses a safety belt, or maybe even refuses to buckle up.

Safety belts should always be worn with the lap belt low and snug across the hips and the shoulder belt across the chest. Shoulder belts should never be placed under the arm or behind the back. In older vehicles with separate lap and shoulder restraints, both systems must be used.

Front seat drivers and passengers should sit upright against the back

of the seat. Passengers should adjust the seat as far back from the dashboard as practical. Drivers should adjust the seat such that they position themselves away from the air bag module, while maintaining the ability to safely operate all vehicle controls. Moving the seat back, slightly reclining

the seat back and/or tilting the adjustable steering wheel downward can change the driving position. NHTSA recommends there must be at least 10 inches distance between the steering wheel hub, where the air bag module is located, and the driver's breastbone.

All front seat occupants must be correctly positioned in order to optimize the benefits of a deploying air bag. The proper use of safety belts is an important part of correct positioning. Unbelted or improperly belted occupants can come into contact with the air bag module during pre-crash braking. Sitting near or against an air bag module when it deploys can result in serious or fatal injury.



Pregnant women should always wear their safety belts. They should sit as far back as possible from the air bag with the lap portion of the belt correctly positioned over the hips (not the stomach) and the shoulder portion across the chest.

So what can you do if your seat belt doesn't fit comfortably? Some smaller adults may find that the shoulder portion of a lap/shoulder belt rubs on their face or neck. Moving the seat forward or backward or shifting slightly in the seat can often relieve uncomfortable rubbing. Additionally, many newer vehicles have restraint systems that can be adjusted.

Booster seats can be utilized for children over 40 pounds to provide more safety than the use of the vehicle's restraint system alone. Seat belts are made to fit adults and do not protect small children properly. Booster seats work by raising the child up so the lap and shoulder belts are positioned properly across the child's chest and hips. Tucking the seat belt under the child's arm or behind their back also may cause more serious injuries during a crash.

For larger people, if the vehicle's restraint system does not fit, the next step may be to purchase an aftermarket restraint system. Oregon law requires that any belt system installed must meet the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, so it's a good idea to have such a system installed professionally. Some manufacturers produce safety belt extenders that do not meet the federal safety standards. Check packaging and labeling to determine compliance, and keep supporting documentation with your registration and insurance in the event of a traffic stop or a crash. Some extenders are provided free of charge by the dealer or manufacturer, if requested.

Devices used to introduce slack into the system do not meet federal safety standards. Using such a device is dangerous and put the occupant in violation of the law.

Find out more by downloading the *Safety Belt Comfort Tips* flyer provided ODOT - Transportation Safety Division and shown at right, by [clicking here](#).

SAFETY BELT COMFORT TIPS

**Belt uncomfortable?
Try these tips:**

PROBLEM: Belt crosses face or neck

SOLUTION: Use your car's built-in shoulder belt positioner. Or try moving the seat to change how your shoulder belt fits.

PROBLEM: Belt cuts into neck or shoulder

SOLUTION: Make sure your belt lies flat with no twists. If it is flat, try placing the shoulder belt under your collar or use a padded belt cover.

PROBLEM: Belt not long enough

SOLUTION: Make sure the lap belt rides low – under the belly. This is particularly important for pregnant women. Or ask your auto manufacturer for a safety belt "extender."

Example of built-in shoulder belt positioner

Buckle Up. The Way to Go.
Transportation Safety – ODOT

Sources: *Safety Belt Comfort Tips* - ODOT-Transportation Safety Division; *Air Bags, Safety Belts and Child Safety Seats* – NHTSA.gov; and information posted at Michigan.gov, and KansasHighwayPatrol.org