

What to Do if You Suffer a Seatbelt Injury in a Crash

Seatbelts Save Lives, but They Can Still Cause Serious Injuries

Seatbelts are one of the most important safety inventions ever developed. They save thousands of lives every year by keeping drivers and passengers restrained during a collision. Without a seatbelt, the force of a [car accident](#) can throw you into the windshield or eject you entirely from the vehicle.

However, while seatbelts prevent fatal injuries, [they can also cause harm themselves](#). In many car accidents, people walk away alive only to suffer from significant seatbelt-related injuries. These injuries can be painful, expensive to treat, and long-lasting. In Georgia, if another driver's negligence caused your accident, you have the right to seek compensation not only for obvious traumatic injuries but also for the harm caused by the seatbelt that protected you.

Knowing how seatbelt injuries happen, what signs to watch for, and how they can affect your injury claim is essential. It can make the difference between struggling with medical bills on your own and securing the financial support you need to heal and move forward.

How Seatbelt Injuries Occur in a Crash

Seatbelts are designed to keep your body in place by distributing the crash forces across the strongest parts of your skeleton, primarily your shoulder, chest, and pelvis. This prevents your head from striking hard surfaces inside the vehicle and keeps you from being thrown through a window. However, the force required to hold you still in a serious crash is intense.

When your vehicle stops suddenly because of a collision, your body continues moving at the same speed until the seatbelt restrains you. This sudden stop causes powerful forces to travel through the seatbelt and into your body. Depending on the severity of the impact and how your body moves during the crash, these forces can lead to various injuries.

Common Types of Seatbelt Injuries After Car Accidents

Soft Tissue Injuries

One of the most frequent results of a seatbelt tightening is soft tissue damage. The belt compresses muscles, tendons, and ligaments in your shoulder, chest, and abdomen. This can lead to:

- Bruising or contusions that may appear hours after the crash
- Strains or sprains in the neck, shoulders, or back
- Muscle tears requiring physical therapy to heal properly

The pain from these injuries may last weeks or months, sometimes longer if not properly treated.

Fractured Ribs and Sternum

The shoulder harness crosses the chest and can put enough pressure on the rib cage to crack ribs or even the breastbone (sternum). This is especially true in high-speed crashes. Broken ribs can make breathing painful and increase the risk of lung complications like pneumonia if deep breaths are avoided due to pain.

Internal Injuries

Seatbelts can also cause hidden internal injuries. The belt compresses the abdomen, which can damage internal organs such as the liver, spleen, or intestines. These injuries may not be obvious immediately after the crash. Symptoms like abdominal pain, dizziness, or a feeling of fullness despite not eating should never be ignored.

Seatbelt Syndrome

Doctors use the term “seatbelt syndrome” to describe a combination of external bruising across the belly and chest paired with deeper internal injuries. The pattern of bruising often matches the shape of the seatbelt. If you have these marks after a crash, it is critical to seek medical evaluation for possible internal bleeding or organ damage.

Shoulder and Collarbone Injuries

The diagonal strap of the seatbelt can cause trauma to the collarbone and shoulder. This may result in fractures, joint sprains, or nerve impingement. Shoulder injuries often become chronic if not treated early.

Spinal Injuries

While seatbelts are essential for preventing catastrophic [spinal cord damage](#) from being ejected, the restraint itself can contribute to certain spinal injuries. The force of being held back by the belt can cause herniated discs or aggravate existing degenerative changes in the spine.

Symptoms of Serious Seatbelt Injuries After a Crash

Not all seatbelt injuries are obvious right away. Some internal injuries take time to produce noticeable symptoms. After any crash, be alert for warning signs such as:

- Severe or worsening abdominal pain
- Deep purple bruising across the chest or stomach
- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Dizziness, fainting, or signs of blood loss
- Pain or numbness radiating into the arms or legs
- Increasing neck or back pain

Never assume bruising or soreness from a seatbelt is minor. If in doubt, see a doctor. Catching internal injuries early can prevent life-threatening complications.

How Seatbelt Injuries Can Affect Your Georgia Car Accident Claim

One of the first tactics insurance companies use is arguing that your injuries were caused by something other than their driver's negligence. In seatbelt injury cases, they might say you would have been hurt no matter what or imply your own choices contributed to the severity of your injuries.

Insurance adjusters also try to minimize the value of soft tissue injuries or internal injuries that are not visible on X-rays. They may suggest bruising or muscle strains are not serious enough to justify a substantial settlement.

In reality, seatbelt injuries can require extensive treatment, including imaging studies, hospital observation, or even surgery. They can cause you to miss work for weeks or longer, and the pain can interfere with your ability to perform daily tasks.

An experienced Georgia car accident lawyer understands how to document seatbelt injuries and link them directly to the crash. This includes:

- Obtaining medical records that clearly describe the injury and its relationship to the accident
- Working with your doctors to outline future care needs
- Gathering photos of seatbelt marks and bruising
- Securing testimony that explains how the injury impacts your work and quality of life

By building a strong case, your attorney can push back against insurance companies who try to downplay these injuries.

What If You Were Not Wearing a Seatbelt?

Georgia law requires drivers and front-seat passengers to wear seatbelts. If you were not buckled up at the time of the crash, the insurance company may argue you share some fault. However, Georgia is a modified comparative negligence state. This means you can still recover compensation as long as you were less than 50 percent at fault for your injuries. The total compensation might be reduced by your percentage of fault.

Importantly, even if you were not wearing a seatbelt, the at-fault driver is still responsible for causing the collision. Not wearing a seatbelt does not absolve them of liability, though it can make the legal process more complicated. This is why you need a skilled attorney to handle these arguments and protect your rights.

How Gary Martin Hays & Associates Helps Clients With Seatbelt Injuries

At the [Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C.](#), we have seen firsthand how devastating seatbelt injuries can be. Our legal team takes the time to fully investigate every aspect of your case, making sure that the costs of treating bruised ribs, organ damage, or spinal complications are not overlooked.

When we handle your claim, we work to:

- Prove the seatbelt injuries were a direct result of the crash caused by the negligent driver
- Document the full extent of your pain, suffering, and financial losses
- Handle all negotiations with insurance companies so you do not have to
- Pursue maximum compensation through settlement or take your case to court if necessary

We have recovered [more than \\$1 billion](#) for Georgia families because we refuse to accept lowball offers that do not address the real impact of our clients' injuries.

Talk to a Georgia Car Accident Lawyer About Your Seatbelt Injury Claim

Seatbelts save lives, but they can also leave you with injuries that disrupt your work, your hobbies, and your time with family. You should not have to shoulder these costs alone when someone else caused your crash.

If you or a loved one has suffered seatbelt-related injuries in a car accident anywhere in Georgia, [contact the Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C. today](#). We offer free consultations and only get paid if we recover compensation for you. Let us help you get the medical care and financial support you need to move forward.