



**In A Car Accident?
An Attorney Explains
Exactly What To Do**



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Nothing makes you feel more vulnerable than being in a car accident. The overwhelming powerlessness and confusion make it hard to process the situation, let alone to think about your next steps.

Yet the reality is that decisions in that moment will shape the coming months or years of your life, for better or worse. It's critical to **know what to do** before you step into the car—even for quick trips, given that **most accidents** actually occur near home.

As personal injury attorneys who specialize in auto collisions, we've dealt with the good, the bad, and the ugly of post accident decision-making. Here's what we wish everyone knew to do.

Evaluate everyone's safety & call for help

Everyone's well-being is of the utmost priority. Check yourself, check others, and clear the way for traffic if possible.



Check yourself for injuries

If you are able to move, then go immediately to a safe spot away from traffic or damaged vehicles (which are potentially inflammable).

Obviously, call 911 for any critical injuries as soon as it's safe to get on the phone.

The shock of the moment can make it surprisingly hard to tell whether you've suffered some less catastrophic harm. Try your best to relax and breathe deeply as your level of awareness returns to normal. If possible, think consciously about every body part, one at a time, and dial 911 if you do perceive signs of harm.

If others are injured, stay put and call for help

Assuming you're not seriously injured, your next priority is to see whether anyone—in any of the vehicles involved—has been injured. If so, then call 911 from a safe place, assuming you are able to.

Under no circumstances should you leave the site of the accident. You may and should move to a safe spot, but fleeing the scene altogether may constitute a hit-and-run. Furthermore, fleeing the scene of an injury accident **may be a** felony under Washington law.



If safe, move the vehicles out of traffic

Assuming the vehicles are operable, and nobody in them is too badly hurt to move, then get them out of the way of traffic.

If not, then turn on hazard lights and use reflective triangles or flares (if available) to alert other drivers while you wait for law enforcement to arrive. *Do not accept the services of any unsolicited tow truck.*

Document the incident

If you haven't already called 911, then now's the time to get the police on their way. While you wait for them, document everything (and everyone) that pertains to the incident.

Don't discuss fault or deny injuries

Insurers will decide who is legally at fault—which may be more complex than it seemed from the driver's seat. **No good comes of discussing fault with the other party.** Even if you believe you contributed to the collision, and even if the other driver is demanding that you say so, it is simply not the time or place.

Likewise, even if you're fortunate enough to have escaped injury, **don't say you're not injured.** **Delayed car accident injuries** are far more common than most people realize. Feeling nothing at the moment does not mean you aren't hurt; only a doctor can make that determination.



Exchange information

Ensure that you and the other driver(s) have each other's personal contact information, insurance details, and vehicle information.

Photograph and record the details

Insurance compensation and legal remedies revolve around documentation, so it's critical to photograph the vehicles extensively. Err on the side of too much evidence, not too little, and don't count on the other party to capture all the details.

Write down *every single thing you recall*: the sequence of events, the circumstances, the roadway, and so forth.

The stress of the situation can make it harder than usual to remember essential details. If anyone witnessed the collision, it's wise to record their contact information and observations, as well.

If your insurer provides a mobile app, then you may be able to open a claim and start uploading documentation from the scene.

Follow up

Once you're away from the scene, there are still a few critical things to follow up on.

File an insurance claim

If you haven't already opened a claim with your insurers, now's the time to do so.



You might not be obligated to file a claim, but you'll almost certainly want to. True, it's quite possible that your insurance premiums will rise. Although higher premiums may be hard to swallow, they're often a drop in the bucket compared to the out-of-pocket cost of even minor repairs (let alone any medical or legal complications).

File a report, if an officer hasn't

Generally, the investigating officer will file a report. However, if no officer is investigating, then Washington law **gives you four days** to file a report yourself.

Get a medical check-up

Harm from a car accident isn't always as obvious as you'd think. Some **delayed injury symptoms** may emerge hours or even days after the collision.

If you notice any physical or psychological changes, then see your doctor promptly—even if they don't feel like a big deal.

Consider consulting an attorney

Ideally, insurers settle claims in a prompt and reasonable fashion, and all parties move on with life as soon as possible.

However, there are many situations where insurers are reluctant, liability is complex, or additional legal considerations (like personal behavior or product liability) are involved.

If you find yourself in one of these situations, then consult a legal team who can advise you on your rights and remedies.



As personal injury attorneys who specialize in car accidents, we're all too aware of the financial and personal stakes. We're here to give a clear, candid assessment and—if necessary—to fight for whatever compensation you deserve.

If you've been in an accident, **contact us today for a confidential consultation.**

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