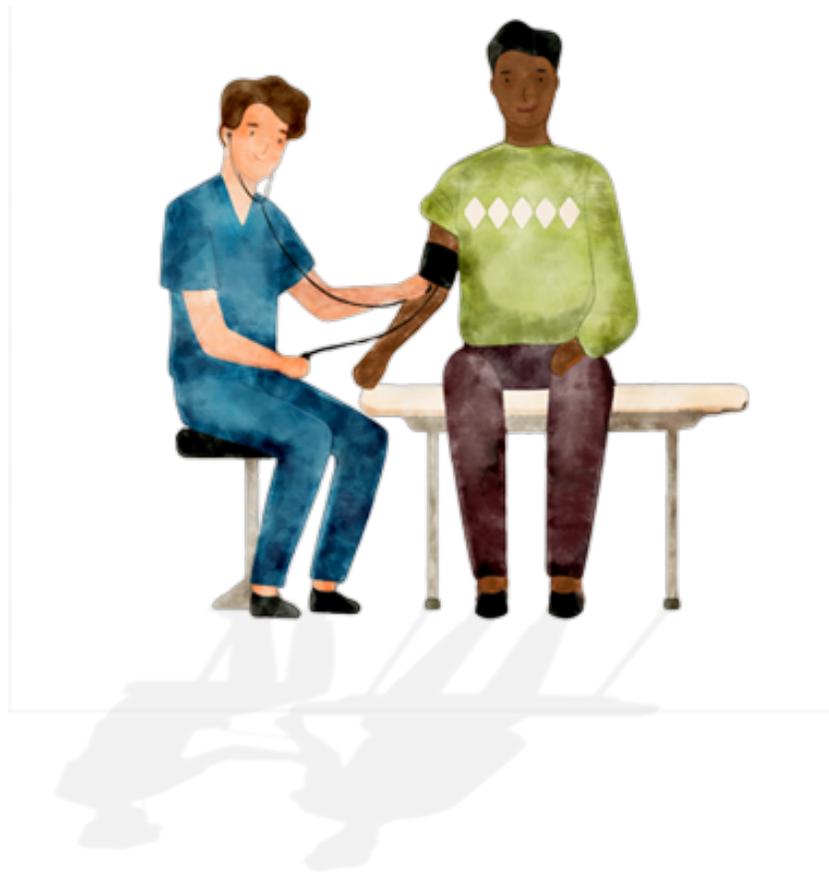




# PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

How and When to Seek Medical Care



**If you believe that you or anyone else may have been seriously injured or have a medical or mental health emergency, immediately dial 911 or contact emergency services.**





## Professional Assistance: How and When to Seek Medical Care

After a traffic collision, it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Your first instinct may be to say, "I'm fine," and minimize the impact of the collision. But traffic collisions are violent events, and it's possible to have sustained an injury—even if you feel fine at first. The most common injuries from traffic collisions are headaches, cuts, scrapes, neck injuries, joint and back pain, broken bones, and emotional trauma. Although most injuries are treatable, proper diagnosis and treatment are essential to healing and recovery.

This guide is here to help you make informed decisions about when to seek medical attention. However, after years of helping victims and survivors of traffic violence, we recommend that you probably need to seek medical attention if you have to ask yourself whether your injuries are serious. It's better to be safe than sorry.

This is especially true if you have any symptoms of neurological or brain trauma. Collision survivors should always consider having their head and brain checked by a specialist to ensure that there is no hidden physical injury due to the impact of the collision.



**If you believe that you or anyone else may have been seriously injured or have a medical or mental health emergency, immediately dial 911 or contact emergency services.**





## WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

A good rule to follow is that if you experience any of the following symptoms after a collision, you should be evaluated by a doctor immediately.

-  **Bone or muscle is visible through a cut, no matter how small the cut is.**
-  **Severe or sharp pain or numbness.**
-  **Dizziness, nausea, or vomiting.**
-  **Disorientation or the inability to remember immediate information.**
-  **Loss of consciousness or the inability to stay awake or focus.**
-  **Shortness of breath or feeling like you can't take a deep or whole breath.**
-  **You are pregnant.**

Other serious injuries may not be immediately visible, and the rush of adrenaline and shock can both lead to feeling “fine” even in the face of traumatic injury. Therefore, the following symptoms should be taken seriously and evaluated by a doctor even if they occur several weeks after a collision:

-  **Any yellow, white, or gray crust on a cut or laceration, no matter how small.**
-  **Ongoing or continuous pain or numbness, even if it is not severe.**
-  **Ongoing dizziness, disorientation, nausea, vomiting, even if intermittent.**
-  **Ongoing confusion, short-term memory loss, or the inability to concentrate.**
-  **Shortness of breath or feeling like you can't take a deep or whole breath.**
-  **Unilateral swelling (swelling in one leg or one arm and not the other).**
-  **Skin rash or blueish skin discoloration.**
-  **Leg or arm that is warm/hot to the touch.**
-  **Blood in the urine.**
-  **Hardness in the abdominal region.**





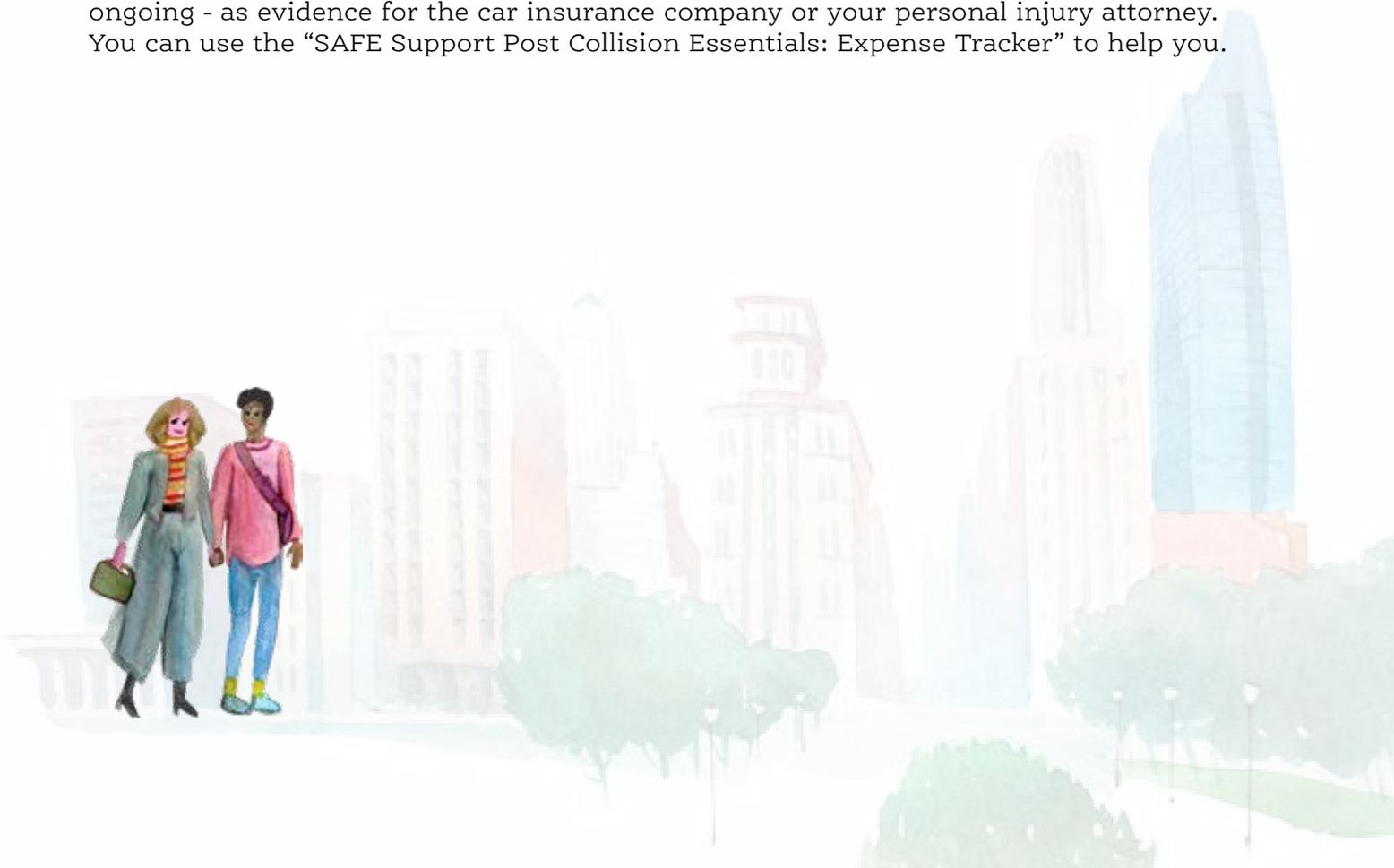
If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to see a doctor as soon as possible for two reasons:

-  **You put your health and well-being at higher risk the longer you go without receiving medical attention.**
-  **The longer you wait after the collision, the more difficult it will be to prove that any injuries you sustained resulted from the car crash.**

### **WHILE YOU'RE WAITING TO SEE THE DOCTOR**

-  **Take pictures of any bruises, cuts, scrapes, or other visible injuries.**
  - Don't worry too much about the quality of the pictures.
  - Use everyday household items like coins, rulers, and credit cards to show the size and shape of bruises, cuts, and scrapes.
-  **Record any pain or other symptoms. The [SAFE Support Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal](#) can help guide you through how to document the impact of a collision on your day-to-day life.**

Once you see your doctor, be sure to record medical expenses - both immediate and ongoing - as evidence for the car insurance company or your personal injury attorney. You can use the "[SAFE Support Post Collision Essentials: Expense Tracker](#)" to help you.





## MINOR INJURY SELF-CARE

Proper self-care can lead to complete healing and a full recovery for minor injuries, such as cuts, scrapes, and joint stiffness. Even if you don't think you need to see a doctor, it's important to engage in effective first aid and home health care practices.

For sprains or bruises, use the RICES method:

-  **Rest** the area.
-  **Ice** it for about 10 minutes on, then at least 10 minutes off, using a cloth between your skin and the ice pack so as not to freeze your skin.
-  **Compress** the area by wrapping it with an elastic bandage—not so tight as to impede circulation.
-  **Elevate** the injury above heart level.
-  **Splint** the injury, so it doesn't move and get injured further.

For cuts and scrapes:

-  **Wash your hands to avoid infection.**
-  **Stop the bleeding by applying gentle pressure with a clean bandage or cloth.**
-  **Clean the wound with water. Keeping the wound under running tap water will reduce the risk of infection. Wash around (not in) the wound with soap. Don't use hydrogen peroxide or iodine, which can be irritating.**
-  **Remove any dirt or debris with tweezers cleaned with alcohol. See a doctor if you can't remove all debris.**
-  **Apply an antibiotic or petroleum jelly in a thin layer to keep the surface moist and help prevent scarring. If a rash appears, stop using the ointment.**
-  **Cover the wound with a bandage, rolled gauze, or gauze held in place with paper tape.**
-  **Change the bandage at least once a day or whenever the bandage becomes wet or dirty.**
-  **Get a tetanus shot if you haven't had one in the past five years.**
-  **Watch for signs of infection and see a doctor right away if you feel increasing pain or see increasing redness, drainage, warmth, or swelling.**



## **IMPORTANT: WHEN YOUR CHILD IS IN A TRAFFIC COLLISION**

Young children may not communicate effectively and have a limited scope of experiences to compare their level or location of the pain. As such, SAFE Support recommends that all children involved in a traffic collision be examined by a medical professional. Even if your child seems fine, symptoms of personal injury may not be immediately apparent.

Also, please remember that you will need to replace your child's car seat, booster seat, and/or any other impact-dampening protective gear (e.g., bicycle or motorcycle helmet, etc.) after an auto collision. Even if the device shows no signs of visible damage, the force of the impact could have caused small cracks in the material and must be replaced.

## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN IN A TRAFFIC COLLISION**

Traffic collisions are frightening regardless of when they occur, but a crash can be especially traumatic for pregnant women. After collisions, they are more susceptible to:



**Miscarriage.**



**Pre-term labor.**



**Placental abruption.**



**We recommend that all pregnant women involved in traffic collisions receive an immediate medical evaluation.**





## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING BRAIN TRAUMA**

It's normal for people to get tension headaches or experience anxiety and other forms of psychological distress after a traffic collision. To assist you with navigating emotional trauma, SAFE has created the document "Getting Back on Your Feet: Dealing with Post-Collision Emotional Trauma", which is available in the SAFE Resource Library.

However, not all emotional distress is psychological. Persistent headaches, sudden mood swings, or significant changes in behavior may be a sign of potential brain trauma and should be evaluated by a doctor. Symptoms may not appear right away, and a person with a traumatic brain injury may or may not lose consciousness. Below is a list of signs and symptoms that may point to a traumatic brain injury or other serious medical issues.

### **PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS**

-  **Persistent headache or headache that worsens.**
-  **Repeated nausea or vomiting.**
-  **Fatigue, drowsiness, or inability to awaken from sleep.**
-  **Problems with speech.**
-  **Dizziness; loss of coordination or balance.**
-  **Loss of consciousness from several minutes to hours.**
-  **Convulsions or seizures.**
-  **Dilation of one or both pupils of the eyes.**
-  **Clear fluids draining from the nose or ears.**
-  **Weakness or numbness in fingers and toes.**

### **SENSORY SYMPTOMS**

-  **Sensory problems include blurred vision, ringing in the ears, a bad taste in the mouth, or changes in the ability to smell.**
-  **Sensitivity to light or sound.**



## **COGNITIVE, BEHAVIORAL, OR MENTAL SYMPTOMS**

-  Loss of consciousness for a few seconds to a few minutes.
-  Being dazed, confused, or disoriented.
-  Memory or concentration problems.
-  Mood changes or mood swings.
-  Agitation, combativeness, or other unusual behavior.
-  Feeling depressed or anxious.
-  Slurred speech.
-  Significant changes in sleep patterns including difficulty sleeping, sleeping more than usual, or difficulty waking up.

## **PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY**

After a traffic collision, make sure you pay attention to and write down any symptoms you experience. SAFE Support provides a “Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal” to help you track your symptoms and other ways the collision impacts your life. Even if the symptoms don’t manifest until days or weeks later, it’s important to take them seriously.





## I'VE BEEN IN A COLLISION...WHAT NOW!?

### 9 STEPS TO GET BACK ON YOUR FEET - A SUMMARY

There are nine basic actions you should take after a collision to help you get back on your feet.



**If you believe that you or anyone else may have been seriously injured or have a medical or mental health emergency, immediately dial 911 or contact emergency services.**

#### 1. Document evidence and write down important information.



Write down witness names, contact info, and other important information using “Post Collision Essentials: What to do at the Scene of a Collision”.



Taking photos and gathering other evidence is a task that might make sense for family members and friends that want to help.

#### 2. DO NOT admit fault or give a recorded or written statement without seeking legal advice.



State law requires you to exchange insurance information at the scene of the collision. You are not required to share any other information or statements.



Don't sign any documents or let someone record your voice without talking to an attorney. These statements can be used against you later.



For further information on what to do, see SAFE Support's “Post Collision Essentials: What to do at the Scene of a Collision”.

#### 3. Seek medical care right away and follow your doctor's advice.



If you are hurt, waiting to see a doctor or ignoring their advice can hurt your insurance claim.

#### 4. File a police report.



State law requires filing a report if you are injured or if damages are more than \$500. But it's a good idea to file a report even if you think your damages are less than \$500.



If the collision occurs in the City of Los Angeles, you can use SAFE Support's "Post Collision Essentials: How to Fill Out an Online LAPD Traffic Collision Report" to help you.

## **5. Contact your insurance company and start an insurance claim.**



Your insurance company can refuse to protect you if the collision isn't reported right away. You can find help with filing an insurance claim in SAFE Support's "Professional Assistance: How and When to File an Insurance Claim".



Ask your insurance agent about benefits that can help you while waiting to settle your claim. Benefits often include car repair, rental cars, wage loss, or medical bill coverage. Using these benefits shouldn't raise your insurance rates if the collision wasn't your fault.

## **6. Consult with an attorney.**



The first call or meeting with an attorney is almost always free. Ask what assistance they can provide.



Collision victims with attorneys normally recover two to three times as much as people who try to deal with an insurance company on their own. Most attorneys only get paid if you do.



The SAFE Support documents "Professional Assistance: When to Seek Legal Advice" and "Professional Assistance: How to Find a Great Attorney" can help you with this.

## **7. Get help from SAFE Support.**



Crashes are traumatic experiences. Get support from friends and family or professionals. SAFE Support is a family of survivors that offers a support community for you and your family.

## **8. Start an impact journal and keep records.**



Take time to write down how a collision affects your day-to-day life. If you decide to make a claim against the other driver, you will need this information.



Use SAFE Support's "Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal" and "Post Collision Essentials: Expense Tracker" to help capture important details.



## 9. Join our Movement for Safer Streets.



We are a family of people personally affected by collisions and are here to help you get back to a normal life. Healing can include holding drivers accountable and assisting in preventing further crashes. Visit [www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/join-the-movement](http://www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/join-the-movement) to learn more.

All documents referenced in this guide are available in the SAFE Support Resource Library at:

[www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library](http://www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library).



# SAFE SUPPORT

Free support services for survivors of street collisions and their loved ones.

**You are not alone.**

We are available to provide you with the following services:

- Patient Advocacy
- Medical Issues
- Insurance Difficulties
- On-Line Police Reports
- Post-Collision Resource Guides
- Emotional Support
- Legal Referrals
- Navigating the Justice System
- Remembrance & Speaking Out
- Child & Family Grief Support

**Monday through Friday**

9 am—5 pm

After-hours available upon request

**(844) 204-7233**

**[www.SAFE-Support.org](http://www.SAFE-Support.org)**

**StreetsAreForEveryone.org**

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Tax Exempt #47-3036490

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