Fleet Focus –Seat Belts. Driver Article.

**Belt up, every trip**

Seat belts save lives. It’s as simple as that. [One quarter of people](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-fatal-4-factsheet-2023/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-fatal-4-seatbelt-factsheet-2023) who died in road collisions in 2023 were not wearing their seatbelt. One in five drivers and front seat passengers, and four out of every ten unrestrained back seat passengers involved in fatal collisions were not wearing seatbelts. [Half of the drivers](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-fatal-4-factsheet-2023/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-fatal-4-seatbelt-factsheet-2023) who die at night are not wearing seatbelts. Government studies suggest that [6.3% of van and truck drivers](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seatbelt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2023/seatbelt-wearing-rates-england-2023#by-vehicle-type) do not wear their seatbelts, despite being disproportionately involved in road collisions.

According to the PACTS study [*What kills most on the roads?(see page 23)*](https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-What-kills-most-on-the-roads-Report-15.0.pdf)

**“Vans/LGVs are the other vehicle in 10 times more collisions than cars or pedestrians.”**

A larger vehicle gives you more infrastructure around you to disperse the forces of a collision, but that isn’t enough to keep you safe. Without a seatbelt you can be thrown against the interior, thrown out of the vehicle, or trapped within it. Seatbelts are particularly important in the event of a roll-over.

Recent data from America shows that [64% of big rig drivers who died](https://www.freightwaves.com/news/feds-report-more-truck-drivers-dying-from-not-using-seat-belts) in collisions were not wearing their seat belts – and of those 75% were thrown out of the truck.

Driving is the riskiest thing you do, regardless of your occupation or hobbies. Wearing your seatbelt can [reduce your risk of death by 50%](https://www.pacts.org.uk/pacts-briefing-seat-belts-time-for-action/) - but only if you wear it.

**Why are belts so important?**

Seat belts protect you from the effects of inertia. Inertia means that if a vehicle stops suddenly, for example because it has hit something, the contents continue to move at their previous speed. If there was nothing at all in their way, and they could discharge their momentum over a long, uninterrupted period of time, the energy on impact might be relatively small. However, that doesn’t happen in vehicle collisions. All that energy is discharged suddenly and with huge destructive power. The person’s momentum will go from high to zero in a couple of seconds as they inevitably collide with something – the dashboard, the windscreen, the road etc.

Seatbelts don’t just keep you in your seat. They are designed to discharge your body’s momentum more slowly, thereby doing you far less damage. This happens because the seat belt locks and then stretches so that the energy pushing against it is dispersed more slowly. A person wearing a seatbelt [takes five times longer](https://www.cyberphysics.co.uk/topics/forces/seatBelt.html) to discharge their momentum – and that’s what saves your life. The seat belt also spreads the forces applied across a much larger area of your body, thereby limiting injury.

**Make sure it fits**

It’s important to wear seatbelts correctly, but as with most things they are designed for an ‘average’ person. The lap belt should sit across your hip bones, beneath the belly, and the shoulder belt should cross the shoulder and diagonally across the chest. If you don’t match the standard dimensions the belt was designed for, then you can use clips or extenders to keep the belt in the proper position. Don’t be tempted to let it rest across your neck, or to pass it under your arm.

Adaptations are also available to make seatbelts more comfortable, such as shoulder padding. However, make sure, with your employer, that these do not compromise the safe functioning of the belt.

Airbags also help to disperse energy in the event of a collision and place a cushion of air between you and the hard surfaces of the vehicle. However, you still need a seat belt to keep you in place. Many commercial vehicles do not have airbags.

[Exemptions](https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/when-you-dont-need-to-wear-a-seat-belt)

Anyone who does not have a medical exemption must wear a seatbelt whenever they are driving. However, there are some occasions when you can release the belt, such as when reversing. It must be re-fastened as soon as have finished reversing.

Medical exemptions can be granted if your GP believes that a seatbelt could cause significant damage due to a medical condition or pregnancy. This risk has to be weighed against the risk of being unrestrained in a collision.

If you have a physical condition such as a colostomy bag which could be affected by seatbelt use, discuss the possibility of a customised belt or stoma pillow with a medical supply specialist and your employer.

**Penalties**

If you don’t wear a seatbelt you can face a [£100 fixed penalty notice](https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law), or a £500 fine in court.

**Other vehicle occupants**

Many at-work drivers are the only occupant of their vehicle, but this isn’t always true. Everyone in your vehicle must be properly restrained. [Children under 135cm](https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law) or 12 years old must be in appropriate car seats, and animals must be contained with belts, crates or guards to prevent them injuring themselves or causing injury or distraction to the driver. All older children or adults in the vehicle must wear seat belts. This is (usually) their legal responsibility, but as a driver, you should insist. An unrestrained passenger is as likely to kill you in a collision as they are to die themselves.