

Involved in a Car Accident?



Here's What to do Next

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As a former personal injury paralegal, I've dealt with my fair share of auto accident victims. I have also been in several accidents myself where the other driver was at fault and I was injured. Too often however, [in the moments directly following an accident](#), people forget what they should and should not do. This is an 8-tip checklist of what to do when you're involved in an automobile accident.



1. Move to a Safe Area (if possible)

If the accident is minor and your vehicles are obstructing traffic, move to the side of the road if it is safe to do so and you can. Be sure to put your vehicle in park and turn the engine off and ensure your hazard lights are on.

2. Check on Others Involved

Check on your passengers, the driver and passengers of the other vehicle(s), and any pedestrians that may have been involved if you are able to. If you are injured, remain with your vehicle until the police arrive.

3. Call Local Law Enforcement

No matter how minor the accident may seem, call local law enforcement to come out and do an accident report. A police report can be invaluable when submitting a claim and determining who was at fault for the accident.

4. Collect Information

In an automobile accident, most people only gather the information from other drivers. While that is vital information, you also need to obtain the names and contact information for any passengers and pedestrians that may have been involved in the accident. You should also obtain the contact information of any eyewitnesses that are at the scene. They may be needed later down the road as an eyewitness if your case goes to court to explain what happened during the accident.

You should take photos of the vehicles involved, including photos of the license plate numbers. Be sure to exchange driver's license information as well as insurance company information (name of the company, whose name the insurance is in, and the policy number).

Make sure you get the police officer's name and badge number as your insurance company may need to contact the officer to clarify information in their police report. You should also get the report number so that you can request a copy from the police department later, and you should ask if there are any charges being filed because of the accident and against whom those charges are being filed.



5. Go to the Emergency Room

If you were hit by another vehicle, always go to the emergency room immediately after an accident. While you may feel fine now, the adrenaline may be dulling the pain from any injuries you may have sustained. I've seen it happen too many times - where an individual says they are fine and goes on about their day and two days later they are in so much pain they can't move due to internal soft tissue injuries.

Even if you were not hit by another vehicle, perhaps you were the passenger in another vehicle or a pedestrian who was hit, always go to the emergency room to be checked out for injuries. As I stated, you may not always feel an injury right away and even though it may seem like an inconvenience, it will be to your health and benefit down the road.

If your vehicle is drivable, drive yourself to the emergency room to be checked out after you are cleared to leave the scene. If your vehicle is totaled and you have someone coming to collect you, have them take you to the emergency room, or have the police officer call an ambulance to transport you to the emergency room and have your friend collect you there afterwards.

6. Contact Your Insurance Company

Notify your insurance company about the accident. Even if the other party is at fault, you need to inform your insurance company about what happened. If you can call them at the scene of the accident, even better. They will be able to tell you what information they need to get your claim started and can take care of arranging to have your vehicle towed to a body shop or start the process of getting you a rental vehicle.

Your insurance company will advise you about contacting the other driver's insurance company and let you know how to proceed with them as to filing a claim against their insured driver.

Do not sign or agree to any monetary compensation from your insurance company or the other party's insurance company until you have an attorney look over the documents - which brings us to our next point.



7. Hire a Personal Injury Attorney

Unlike criminal and civil attorneys, a personal injury attorney will never charge you to take your auto accident case up front. Most work on a contingency basis - receiving 33% of whatever they can recover from the insurance company in a

settlement. A good personal injury attorney will focus their attention on getting you the highest settlement possible - and instruct you to simply focus on getting better and following your doctor's instructions.

While some things have changed since I was a legal assistant, the fundamentals have not changed. If you live in Florida, this [personal injury attorney Tampa](#) is a good example of what your personal injury attorney should be doing for you.

- They will obtain and review a copy of the accident report for you
- Speak to the investigating officer
- Locate and speak with eyewitnesses and others involved in the accident
- Obtain photographs of the vehicles involved
- Speak to your doctor and review your medical records to assist your doctor in giving you the best possible care for your injuries
- Obtain and review your medical bills (including ambulance charges, prescription costs, medical device costs - such as neck braces, crutches, wheelchair, etc.)
- Communicate with your insurance company and the other party's insurance company
- Review any potential lost wages
- Review the at-fault driver's driving record and criminal record

Once you have been released from treatment by your physician, your personal injury attorney will begin negotiating a settlement on your behalf with the insurance company. They will pull together all the information above, plus everything that you provide to them from the next tip.

8. Keep an Accident Journal

One of the first things I always told my clients was to [keep an accident journal](#). The first few days of an accident you can be disoriented, feeling overwhelmed, so having a place to keep everything pertaining to the accident and how you are feeling is vital.

Keep copies of the accident report, the witness information, the insurance information for the other parties. Record dates of emergency room visits and what you were seen for. Record dates and times of all medical appointments related to your accident. Have you missed time from work due to the accident? Record the dates and hours missed for a potential lost wage claim. If you have a particularly rough day - you are in a lot of pain, unable to leave the house, feeling anxious about

driving - anything that has to do with your ability to function normally after the auto accident, keep a record of it. While you may think it is something minor - it may be something your attorney can use to help your case.

Getting through the first 48 to 72 hours after an auto accident are nerve-wracking. However, if you follow these steps, you will have a clear and concise record of events to provide to your insurance company and to your attorney. Providing them with this detailed information that you have collected from the very first minute, can mean all the difference.

While we hope you never have to use it, you can keep this handy PDF in your glove compartment and use it as a checklist if you are ever involved in an auto accident.