

Accidents and injury - reducing the risks

Serious or complex injuries can occur as a result of car accidents, falls from high places, industrial and farming accidents, or other such events. Major physical trauma is the term used to describe serious or complex injuries caused by an external force.

In Victoria, major physical trauma is the leading cause of death in people aged one to 44 years and, for every death, there are 31 hospital admissions and 144 hospital emergency department visits.

Most major trauma can be avoided. Many accidents aren't accidents at all and the risk of injury can be minimised by simple measures.

In the car

Suggestions include:

- Always wear your seatbelt.
- Ensure that children are restrained in age-appropriate child restraints.
- Obey all road rules.
- Drive defensively.
- Make sure your car is mechanically sound.
- Avoid fatigue, especially on long drives.
- Don't drink and drive.
- Don't accept a lift from someone who has been drinking and, if you can, encourage them to find alternative transport home.

Pedestrians and cyclists

Suggestions include:

- Always cross the road carefully.
- Use a pedestrian crossing if one is available.
- Never cross a road on a bend or curve.
- Educate children on road safety.
- Always accompany small children near roads and traffic.
- Always hold the hands of young children when crossing a road.
- Make sure children wear 'Australian approved' helmets and protective gear when riding bikes and scooters.
- Wear full protective gear when cycling.
- Be aware of your surroundings – never assume that a driver has seen you or intends to stop.
- When walking or cycling at night, wear bright coloured clothing and be extra alert to dangers.
- Fit reflective safety discs to your bicycle for night cycling.

Falls prevention – children

Suggestions include:

- Make your home safe and 'child friendly'.
- Australia has some of the highest standards in the world when it comes to children's equipment, so buy 'Australian approved' play equipment and safety devices.
- Always watch children when they are playing outside the home and on play equipment.
- To soften any falls, put tan bark underneath outdoor play equipment at home.
- Always use the safety harness in prams, strollers and high chairs.
- Never leave a baby unsupervised on a change table.
- Barricade any stairs.

- Make sure that a child can't access and fall out of any windows.

Falls prevention – older people

Suggestions include:

- Have regular medical checkups, including eyesight tests.
- Choose well-fitting, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- Participate regularly in exercise that helps with agility, strength, balance and coordination.
- Make sure all stairs are well lit.
- Avoid climbing on footstools, chairs and other pieces of furniture.
- If necessary, install handrails in the bathroom near the bath, shower and toilet.
- Remove loose mats and rugs.
- Remove obstacles from living areas and ensure that walkways and pathways are clear.

In the workplace

Suggestions include:

- Use safe practices at work to avoid major accidents.
- Use protective equipment.
- Rearrange your workstation or use equipment to avoid heavy lifting.
- If heavy lifting is unavoidable, use good posture and squat to lift with your thighs (rather than your back) to avoid spinal injuries.
- Participate in regular activities that enhance your fitness and strength.
- See your occupational health and safety officer for suggestions specific to your industry.

Sports and leisure activities

Suggestions include:

- Use safe practices at play to prevent major accidents.
- Wear all protective equipment appropriate to your sport, such as a helmet and kneepads.
- When swimming, check the depth of water before diving in.
- Examine the general area for any obstacles before diving into water or skiing.
- Don't take any unnecessary risks when horse riding, snow or water skiing, rock climbing, hang gliding or trampolining.
- Check with your sporting association for any specific safety suggestions.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000) for an ambulance
- Your doctor
- Hospital emergency department
- Hospital social worker
- Your sporting association
- Occupational health and safety officer
- Safety Centre Telephone Advisory Line, Royal Children's Hospital. Tel. (03) 9345 5085

Things to remember

- Major physical trauma is the term used to describe serious or complex injuries caused by an external force, such as through car accidents, falls from high places, industrial and farming accidents, or other such events.
- Many accidents aren't accidents at all and the risk of injury can be minimised by simple measures.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Victorian State Trauma System

This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. The information provided was accurate at the time of publication and is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.

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