



After a car crash

What to expect on the road to recovery

How can you expect to react and feel?

Being in a car crash may be stressful. Knowing what to expect can be difficult. It helps to understand the common physical symptoms and emotional responses that people can experience. These include:

COMMON PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Tiredness
- Disturbed sleep
- Nausea
- Nightmares
- Restlessness
- Headaches
- Pain

COMMON EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

- Poor attention and memory
- Intrusive images and thoughts
- Fear, avoidance and withdrawal
- Tearfulness, low mood and depression
- Feeling 'on guard' and constantly 'alert'
- Frustration, anger, regret and guilt
- Stress, anxiety and panic

You may not experience any or all of these and some may seem unusual. However they are all considered normal. There is no right or wrong way to respond.

How long will it take you to recover?

Each person's experience of recovery is different. Some people will have strong emotional responses such as fear, sadness, guilt and anger. These feelings are usually brief and should begin to reduce in the days and weeks after the car crash.

The length of time physical symptoms last depends on your injury. Some of the common types of injuries from car crashes include broken bones, neck and back pain. For most people the pain is mild to moderate and usually lasts for less than six to eight weeks. Your doctor can help you manage your pain during this period if required. Pain usually doesn't keep you from your normal activities beyond the first week and gradually gets better.

When should you seek professional help?

No two people will respond to a car crash in the same way. Some people will experience symptoms and have emotional responses that last for longer than might be expected. Some specific signs to watch out for are:

- pain or physical symptoms lasting longer than you expected
- feelings that things are not returning to normal in the time you expected
- not returning to work and other usual daily activities
- finding that relationships with family and friends are suffering
- finding you are withdrawing from family and friends and your usual activities
- feeling unable to cope with or handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- having disturbed sleep or nightmares.

Where can I go for help?

Your doctor is a good place to start. They know if there is a problem and what to do next. To help your recovery they might recommend you see another health professional like a physiotherapist or psychologist.

If you have treatment you should notice improvements. If you are not improving, the treatment might not be right for you. You should talk to your doctor about other treatment options.

If you need treatment, you may be eligible to make a claim under the NSW Compulsory Third Party Insurance Scheme. To find out more about the scheme contact the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) on 1300 656 919 or visit www.sira.nsw.gov.au.

AFTER A CAR CRASH, 70% OF

PEOPLE ARE BACK AT WORK

WITHIN EIGHT WEEKS

What can you do to help your recovery?

The good news is that there is a lot you can do. People find it useful to remind themselves they have had a stressful experience and to 'take charge' of their own recovery.

Remember you don't have to be completely recovered to resume usual activities or work. Staying at work and keeping your normal routine as much as possible is good for your recovery.

FIND WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

The best person to manage your recovery is you. Find ways to manage your symptoms and cope with difficulties.

STAY POSITIVE

Focus on all the things you can do and those you enjoy doing. Keep motivated. Try not to get frustrated if things don't happen as quickly as you would like.

STAY ACTIVE

Maintain your normal routine at work, at home, with friends and in your day-to-day activities as much as possible.

FOCUS ON STAYING OR RETURNING TO WORK

Staying at work is good for you, even if you can only manage a shorter working day or lighter duties to begin with. If away from work, start planning to return to work. The sooner you return the better your recovery is likely to be.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Ensure you exercise, eat a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol and drugs and take time off to relax.

TALK TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Spend time with people close to you. Talk to them about your feelings and about how they can help you recover.

PACE YOURSELF

You don't have to wait until you feel 100 per cent recovered to resume activities. However, you should pace yourself and build up your activities gently. Don't ignore pain and ensure you have proper rest.

STAY IN TOUCH

If you are away from your normal activities, whether at work or socially, stay in touch with your work mates, friends and family. Talk regularly with your doctor, employer or anyone else involved in your recovery.

Helpful information

The State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) regulates the NSW Motor Accidents Compulsory Third Party (CTP) scheme. The Claims Advisory Service can be contacted on 1300 656 919.

Visit www.sira.nsw.gov.au/injuryadvicecentre for further information to assist you on the road to recovery.

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State Insurance Regulatory Authority
Level 25, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000

General phone enquiries 1300 137 131

Claims Advisory Service 1300 656 919

Website www.sira.nsw.gov.au

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