

What Are the Most Common Car Accident Back Injuries?

A Maryland car accident lawyer explains what injury victims need to know

[Car accidents](#) often cause serious injuries. And one of the most common – and most severe – injuries people sustain in motor vehicle accidents is back injuries. In an instant, a lower back injury or a spinal cord injury can change someone's life forever.

Why are back injuries caused by car crashes so common? How does someone know if they have a back injury? What medical treatments are available? And what if someone still has chronic back pain months or years after the accident? What legal options are available for car accident back injury victims in Maryland?

Our Silver Spring car accident attorneys explain what to know. Our knowledge comes from years of experience dealing with such complex legal cases in Montgomery County and throughout Maryland.

How common are car accident back injuries?

Back injuries are among the most common motor vehicle accident injuries overall. Exact statistics are hard to find, but the number of back injuries sustained in car crashes is easily in the millions each year.

One study reported that 31 percent of car accident injury victims suffered from lower back pain that lasted at least a year after the accident. Another study published by the [National Library of Medicine](#) found that 50 percent of car accident injury victims had lower back pain, even if they were involved in low-speed car accidents (roughly 10 mph at the time of the crash).

What are the most common car accident back injuries?

While many different types of back injuries often occur as a result of a serious car accident, certain types of back injuries are more common than others, including:

- **Whiplash:** Nearly 3 million people each year sustain this muscle strain injury in the upper back and neck due to car accidents.
- **Lower back pain:** Millions of people suffer from long-term, chronic lower back pain as a result of motor vehicle accidents.
- **Torn back muscle:** There are 80 muscles located in the back, 40 on each side of the spine. Many times, these muscles get torn due to the force of a car accident.
- **Spinal cord injury:** Roughly 40 percent of all spinal cord injuries nationwide occur as a result of car accidents, which works out to roughly 18,000 spinal cord injuries each year.
- **Herniated disc:** The cushion-like pads located in between the vertebra bones in the spine are called discs. When these discs get pushed out of place, that's called a herniated disc, something that often occurs in car crashes.

- **Vertebrae fractures:** The vertebrae bones in the back sometimes get broken, especially in severe car crashes.
- **Sciatica:** The sciatic nerve connects the lower back muscles to the muscles in the legs. Many times, car accidents cause the sciatic nerve to be stretched, resulting in a painful nerve condition known as sciatica.
- **Thoracic spine injury:** The medical term for the midsection of the back is called the thoracic spine. Made up of 12 vertebrae bones and surrounding muscles, thoracic spine injuries often occur due to car crashes and can cause significant pain.
- **Facet joint injury:** Facet joints are the connective tissues located between vertebrae bones and help people bend, twist and move more smoothly. Many times, car accidents damage facet joints, which can cause back pain, reduced mobility and other medical problems.

Why do car crashes cause so many back injuries?

Car crashes often cause serious, painful back injuries due to the powerful forces and sudden movements involved. When cars collide, the impact of a crash can place a lot of strain on the spine and surrounding muscles. Here are several specific reasons why car accidents often result in back injuries:

- **Sudden deceleration and impact:** In a car crash, especially high-speed collisions, the body is subjected to rapid deceleration. When a moving vehicle suddenly stops or is struck, the energy from that impact transfers to the occupants, causing the body to jolt or be thrown forward. This force often places extreme stress on the spine, resulting in back pain, strain or injuries.
- **Body position and restraint systems:** During an accident, seat belts are crucial in preventing occupants from being ejected or thrown forward. However, the seat belt's restraint can also create pressure on the body, particularly around the chest, abdomen and spine. This can lead to the spine absorbing a significant amount of force, especially if the occupant twists or turns upon impact. The position of the body at the time of impact plays a big role in how much strain the back absorbs.
- **Shock and lack of preparedness:** Unlike athletes who brace for impact in contact sports, drivers and passengers in car crashes are often caught off guard, with no time to tense their muscles or prepare their bodies. This lack of readiness means the spine and surrounding muscles absorb the shock without resistance, increasing the likelihood of a back injury.
- **Vehicle dynamics and collision types:** The type of collision (rear-end, side-impact or head-on collision) can influence the likelihood of a back injury. For example, rear-end collisions often cause a "whipping" motion, where the upper body jerks forward and then snaps back, stressing the spinal area. Side-impact crashes often place unnatural forces on the spine due to lateral (sideways) movement, which is not a natural motion for the back. Head-on collisions can put intense strain and force on the entire back and result in severe back injuries.

All of these factors and others make the spine particularly vulnerable in car accidents, often resulting in a large number of back-related injuries even in low-speed collisions.

What are common car accident back injury symptoms?

You should seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following symptoms after your car accident. These symptoms often indicate that a severe back injury took place:

- Back pain that does not go away after several hours, days or even longer.
- Difficulty moving or standing up.
- Sharp shooting pain in the back.
- Limited range of motion, including not being able to twist, bend or stand up straight.
- Muscle spasms, especially in the lower back.
- Stiffness in the back or shoulders.
- Tingling sensation in hands or feet.

These are just some of the warning signs of a serious back injury. If something doesn't feel right, see a doctor right away so they can examine you and diagnose exactly what's wrong. Your health and well-being should always come first.

How do doctors diagnose back injuries after a car crash?

Doctors and other medical professionals often use a variety of medical procedures to diagnose back injuries caused by car accidents. Depending on the type of back injury, doctors often use these medical procedures to correctly diagnose a back injury and the severity of the injury:

- **Physical examination and medical history:** Doctors begin by reviewing the patient's medical history and discussing any symptoms, such as pain, numbness, or tingling. During the physical exam, they check for visible signs of injury, assess the range of motion, and evaluate the patient's reflexes, muscle strength, and response to touch. This initial exam helps identify possible areas of concern in the spine and back muscles.
- **Imaging tests:** If further evaluation is needed, doctors may order imaging tests to get a detailed view of the spine and surrounding structures. Common imaging tests include:
 - **X-rays** are often the first imaging test performed, as they can reveal fractures, dislocations, and other structural issues in the vertebrae.
 - **CT scans** provide a more detailed cross-sectional view of the bones and can detect fractures not visible on an X-ray.
 - **Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** scans allow doctors to examine soft tissues, such as muscles, discs, and nerves, allowing doctors to identify injuries like herniated discs or spinal cord damage.
- **Nerve function tests:** In cases where there is suspicion of nerve damage or spinal cord injury, doctors may perform electromyography (EMG) or nerve conduction studies. These tests assess the electrical activity in the nerves and muscles, helping pinpoint areas where nerve function may be impaired.
- **Diagnostic injections:** Many times, physicians inject an epidural steroid into the spine to identify the precise location of a back injury.

- **Flexibility tests:** Physicians will often observe patients while they perform routine physical activities, such as twisting or bending, to determine if someone exhibits symptoms of a back injury.

By combining these diagnostic methods, doctors can accurately determine the type and extent of a back injury following a car accident.

There's also another important reason why car accident injury victims should have a doctor diagnose their back injury. By doing so, there will be an official medical record of the injury, which can be critical when trying to obtain financial compensation after an accident.

What medical treatments are available for back injuries?

Depending on the severity and the type of back injury, there are many medical treatments available for such injuries, including:

- Back surgery, which often involves follow-up back operations in cases involving severe back injuries with chronic back pain.
- Rest, ice, compression and elevation, a medical treatment often referred to as RICE and which is often used in cases involving severe back pain.
- Spinal injections, including epidural steroid injections, which are often administered for severe back pain.
- Physical therapy, which can be effective for treating long-term, chronic back pain.

Who's responsible for paying for my Maryland car accident back injury?

First, it's important to understand how car accident compensation works in general in Maryland. The state has an at-fault car insurance system. That means the at-fault party must pay for all accident expenses for anyone who experiences a financial loss as a result of the accident. In most cases, this means the money comes from one or more of the following sources:

- **At-fault driver's insurance:** If another driver caused the accident, you can file a claim with their insurance company to cover medical expenses, lost wages, and other damages related to your back injury. Maryland law requires drivers to carry minimum liability coverage of \$30,000 per person for bodily injury, \$60,000 per accident, and \$15,000 for property damage.
- **Personal Injury Protection (PIP):** Maryland drivers are required to carry PIP coverage, which provides no-fault benefits for medical expenses and lost wages. Even if you are partially at fault, PIP coverage can offer immediate assistance without waiting for fault determination. Maryland allows PIP waivers, so checking your policy is essential to know if you have this coverage.
- **Uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage (UM/UIM):** If the at-fault driver lacks sufficient insurance or has no insurance at all, you may rely on UM/UIM coverage under

your own policy. This coverage can help bridge the gap and provide compensation for your back injury when the responsible party's insurance falls short.

In cases where fault is disputed, or if you face resistance from insurance companies, a Maryland car accident lawyer can help negotiate with insurers and, if necessary, file a car accident lawsuit on your behalf seeking damages, the legal term for financial compensation for losses.

Can I sue the other driver who caused my car accident?

Yes, if another driver's negligence caused your Maryland car accident and you sustained a serious back injury, you have the right to file a car accident lawsuit against the driver who caused your collision.

To succeed, you must establish that the other driver was completely at fault for causing your accident. Maryland operates under contributory negligence rules, meaning that if you are found to be even 1 percent at fault, you can be barred from recovering damages (financial compensation). This strict rule makes it essential to gather solid evidence to prove the other driver's sole liability.

Here's what else you need to know about filing a lawsuit in Maryland:

- **Filing requirements and evidence:** To pursue a claim, you'll need to provide evidence showing that the other driver's actions (such as speeding, distracted driving, or failing to yield) directly caused your injury. This could include police reports, eyewitness testimonies, traffic camera footage, and medical records detailing your back injury.
- **Damages you can recover:** If successful, you may be eligible to recover compensation for a range of expenses and financial losses, including medical bills, lost wages, pain and suffering, and long-term rehabilitation costs. In severe cases, if your injury limits your ability to work or impacts your quality of life, you may also pursue damages for future loss of earning capacity and ongoing care.
- **Deadline for legal action:** Maryland has a three-year statute of limitations deadline for filing a car accident lawsuit ([Maryland Courts & Judicial Proceedings Code § 5-101](#)). This means you have three years from the date of the accident to file a lawsuit. Filing beyond this deadline could result in your case being dismissed, so it's important to act promptly.

An experienced Maryland car accident lawyer can help you navigate the complexities of your legal case, including gathering evidence in support of your lawsuit so you can pursue the compensation you deserve for your back injury.

Can I get more money if I suffer from chronic back pain due to my car crash?

In most cases, no. If you have already accepted a car accident settlement or a jury verdict has been awarded to you, you cannot ask for more money in the future to pay for future medical care or other future accident-related expenses.

This is why it's critical that you carefully consider all your accident expenses – including future anticipated ones – before agreeing to accept a settlement offer for your car accident. An attorney can help review any offers you receive and advise you on whether you should accept it or ask for more money. If you believe you deserve a better settlement offer, your lawyer can negotiate with insurance companies on your behalf.

Why should I hire a Maryland car accident attorney?

Maryland car accident back injury cases often quickly turn into complex legal battles. Sometimes, it's because the at-fault driver denies doing anything wrong. Other times, the other driver's insurance company might try to claim that your back injury is really a pre-existing medical condition.

Our Maryland car accident lawyers at [Goldberg Finnegan](#) know what's at stake. That's why we want to help. Our legal team can work with you to build the strongest possible legal case. Our [case results](#) speak for themselves, including a \$1.5 million verdict for a car accident injury victim.

Get the Maryland law firm that gets results. Get Goldberg Finnegan. [Contact us](#) and schedule a [free case evaluation](#) with a Silver Spring car accident attorney you can count on. We handle injury claims and lawsuits throughout Maryland.