

Headrests better off too high than too low, experts say

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EXTRACT

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When motorists slip into their driver's seat, they generally have an idea of whether they need to adjust their positioning so that they're in the most optimal spot, whether that's tilting the seat back slightly or moving up so that the pedals can be reached.

But where there may be some confusion is how the headrest should be situated. A question regarding this matter was brought to the attention of The Globe and Mail's Joanne Will.

Will notes that because head restraints tend to differ one to the next, how a head rest should be moved tends to vary depending on the vehicle and who is sitting in the driver's seat. However, U.S.-based Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's Russ Rader says there are some general ground rules.

"Ideally the head restraint should be adjusted so it's as close to the back of your head as you can get it while still being comfortable, and as high on your head as you can get it," said Rader. "We suggest that you adjust head restraint so it's even with the top of your head. That would be the ideal position."

He added that while few people may think about where their head restraint is positioned, this is perhaps one of the most important aspects of driving carefully, seeing as how frequently rear-end crashes occur.

Most drivers don't do anything with their headrests

Indeed, based on research from the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Will points out that more than 50 percent of Canadians don't adjust their head rests so that their risk of injury is reduced. Were they to do so, whiplash-related injuries would be cut nearly in half.

Though whiplash injuries tend to be more severe when traveling at a high rate of speed, even crashes at relatively slow speeds can lead to neck or head trauma. Will points out that IIHS runs safety tests that analyze how protective various headrests are by moving vehicles at a speed of 32 km/h or the equivalent of 20 mph.

According to medical statistics and rural car insurance data, some of the most common injuries people involved in auto accidents face relate to the neck and back, many of which occur when motorists are hit from behind.

In 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation released an in depth road safety report, which detailed the number of fatalities that took place in the year, as well as the nature of the collisions that occurred. Rear-end collisions were the most common ones that

occurred in the year, totaling 63,345, resulting in nearly 12,900 personal injuries and 29 fatalities.

In some instances, automotive accidents occur because of poor visibility conditions. But in 2010, the vast majority of them were unrelated to environmental factors. The report shows that in 85 percent of collisions in 2010, visibility was clear. In addition, the accidents that took place were typically in the daylight hours.

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