

NARRATOR

It's hard to imagine going for a drive without putting your seatbelt on first. Seatbelts can reduce the risk of a fatal or serious injury by around 45% when worn correctly. But some Queenslanders still don't buckle up before every trip which leads to many avoidable deaths on the road. That makes not wearing seatbelts a 'Fatal 5' driving behaviour.

As soon as cars appeared on our roads, crashes weren't far behind. Seatbelts were being used in planes as early as the 1930s but people were still skeptical of their use in cars. The belts were often clunky, hard to buckle, and only restrained the lower portion of a person's body. It wasn't until 1959 that the three-point seatbelt, as we know it, was invented in Sweden by Volvo engineer Nils Bohlin.

Since then, the seatbelt has been redesigned and made much easier to use. Thorough testing, conducted with the help of a couple of heroic dummies, revealed that a lap portion was required to keep the lower body restrained, and a shoulder portion across the chest was added to keep the upper body from moving in a crash. Low anchor points were also added for a good belt fit. But people still needed convincing. So a groundbreaking study was conducted. All injuries from accidents involving Volvo cars over a one-year period were recorded. The seatbelt reduced or prevented injuries by over 45%.

It was clear that seatbelts were here to stay — and in 1970, Victoria, Australia became the first state in the world to make it illegal to drive without one. When we don't buckle up, it's not just ourselves we're putting in danger. If your body is unrestrained when a car crashes, it can bounce around like a pinball — colliding with glass, metal, and other passengers, with deadly force.

This is bad news for any passenger who did the right thing and buckled up but it's already too late — because the entire car is at the mercy of physics. Even low-speed crashes can cause serious injuries.

With the stakes so high, why do some of us continue to risk our lives and those of our passengers? Professor Narelle Haworth thinks there may be a potential link with some other 'Fatal 5' behaviours...

PROF. HAWORTH

About one-quarter of people killed in crashes are not wearing a seatbelt. So, people who are usually wearing a seatbelt might not when they're drunk. There are also some people who don't put their seatbelt on for a short trip because they think the risk is small. Most of our trips are short trips — so if we don't put our seatbelt on, most of the time we're unprotected then.

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And when it comes to people having too many passengers in their cars?

PROF. HAWORTH

Young people like to travel together. Sometimes that means there are more people than there are seatbelts in the car — that's a real problem. It's good to travel together but you should never put more people in the car than you've got seatbelts for.

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And if you're in a situation where you've got more people than spare seats in the car, Professor Haworth's message around this 'Fatal 5' behaviour is pretty clear...

PROF. HAWORTH

Book a ride, take the train, call your parents, but don't put more people in the car than there are seatbelts.

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I couldn't have said it better myself. Seatbelts are one of the best ways to survive a potential crash. Make sure you plan ahead so that everybody gets one. Always buckle up when you get behind the wheel — there's no excuse.