

Safe Driving Includes Proper Headrest Positioning

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Most people understand how to properly use automobile safety devices like seat belts, airbags and car seats, but statistics reportedly suggest the majority of drivers are clueless when it comes to the proper positioning of headrests. In fact, studies show that 90 percent of drivers have their headrests adjusted too low.

"Headrests can go a long way toward reducing neck injuries in the event of a rear-end collision," noted Buzz Rodland, chairman of the American International Automobile Dealers Association. "But they're only effective when positioned correctly relative to the driver's head."

Since rear-end collisions are reportedly more likely to occur in slippery road conditions, now is a good time to ensure that one's headrest is properly positioned.

According to research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a correctly positioned headrest should meet the following criteria:

Headrests should ideally be positioned two inches or less from the rear of the driver's head, and never more than four inches. When adjusting for height, the bulk of the headrest should stand directly behind the driver's head, at ears level. In the event of whiplash, the headrest should contact the head first, not the neck.

Unfortunately, in many older model vehicles, proper headrest adjustment is reportedly difficult if not impossible. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, in 1995 only three percent of vehicles had head restraints rated "good," while 82 percent were rated "poor."

Since then, there has reportedly been a marked improvement in overall standards. In the 2003 model year, 45 percent of vehicle head restraint systems were rated "good," while only 10 percent of systems were rated "poor."

"Automakers are doing a much better job of designing safe headrests, but it's still very important that motorists take the time to manually adjust them," said Rodland. "Far too many people are driving with headrests in the lowest possible position, and as a result, they aren't getting any of the safety benefits."

For more information on proper headrest adjustment, or to learn about one's vehicle's headrest safety rating, visit www.aiada.org/headrestsafety.

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