

What if you are, or a user of your vehicle is, not in one of the listed risk groups?

You are not at risk and do not need an on-off switch. This includes short people, tall people, older people, pregnant women -- in fact, all people, male or female over age 12, who buckle their seat belts and who can sit with 10 inches from the center of their breastbone to where the air bag is stored. You will have the full benefit of your air bag and will minimize the risk of violently striking the steering wheel and dashboard in a moderate to severe crash.

How do I get an on-off switch?

If you are eligible, you must fill out a NHTSA request form. Forms are available at state motor vehicle offices and may be available at automobile dealers and repair shops. You may also get one by calling the NHTSA Hotline or visiting the NHTSA Web site. On the form, you must indicate which air bags you want equipped with an on-off switch, certify that you have read this information brochure, certify that you are, or a user of your vehicle is, a member of a risk group listed above, and identify the group. Then send this form to NHTSA. Upon approval of your request, the agency will send you a letter authorizing an automobile dealer or repair shop to install an on-off switch in your vehicle.

Should a pregnant woman get an on-off switch?

No, not unless she is a member of a risk group. Pregnant women should follow the same advice as other adults: buckle up and stay back from the air bag. The lap belt should be positioned low on the abdomen, below the fetus, with the shoulder belt worn normally. Pull any slack out of the belt. Just as for everyone else, the greatest danger to a pregnant woman comes from slamming her head, neck or chest on the steering wheel in a crash. When crashes occur, the fetus can be injured by striking the lower rim of the steering wheel or from crash forces concentrated in the area where a seat belt crosses the mother's abdomen. By helping to restrain the upper chest, the seat belt will keep a pregnant woman as far as possible from the steering wheel. The air bag will spread out the crash forces that would otherwise be concentrated by the seat belt.

ON-OFF SWITCH PRECAUTIONS

If I turn off my air bag for someone at risk, what precautions should I take for others?

Since the air bag will not automatically turn itself back on after you turn it off with an on-off switch, you must remember to turn it on when someone who is not at risk is sitting in that seat. Every on-off switch has a light to remind you when the air bag is turned off.

If I turn off my air bag, will my seat belts provide enough protection?

Air bags increase the protection you can get from seat belts alone. If the air bag is turned off, you lose this extra protection.

In some newer vehicles, turning off your air bag may have additional consequences. These vehicles have seat belts that were specially designed to work together with air bags. If the crash forces become too great, these new seat belts "give" or yield to avoid concentrating too much force on your chest. The air bag prevents you from moving too far forward after the seat belts