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How To Adjust Your Head Restraint

A head restraint is designed to limit the movement of the head and provide support in an accident. A properly adjusted head restraint will help to protect you against whiplash, and potentially save you from a long-term injury.

Always ensure your head restraint is adjusted properly, as either a driver or a passenger.

In order to correctly adjust a head restraint you should –

- **Ensure that the top of the head restraint is as high as the top of your head**
- **Position the head restraint as close to the rear of your head as possible**

A properly adjusted head restraint will help prevent whiplash by reducing the distance between the back of the head and head restraint, stopping the neck from bending back. It will also reduce the amount of time it takes your head to initially contact the head restraint, and increase the amount of time that your head is supported during an accident.

Having a locking head restraint is important. A head restraint that cannot be locked in position may move during an accident. This can compromise the amount of protection the restraint offers. There is also the danger that rear seat occupants getting in and out of the vehicle could accidentally move the restraint out of position.

When buying a car - especially second hand vehicles - it is important to ensure that the head restraint can be properly adjusted so that it rests behind your head. Information to help you buy a vehicle with a safe head restraint can be found in the accompanying fact sheet called **Safer Head Restraint Designs**.

The following pages show pictures of properly adjusted, and poorly adjusted, head restraints.

Pictures 1 and 2 show an example of a well adjusted head restraint, and then show the same restraint positioned too far away from the back of the head. Pictures 3 and 4 give a comparison between a well adjusted head restraint and a head restraint that is positioned too low. In the real world, many people have poorly adjusted head restraints that are both too low, and too far back from their head.

Examples of Properly and Poorly Adjusted Head Restraints



Picture 1

This picture shows a well-adjusted head restraint, which will reduce the risk of suffering a whiplash injury.

The seat back angle is relatively upright, and this allows the head restraint to be positioned close to the back of the head.

The top of the head restraint is level with the top of the occupant's head, which will also help to prevent injury.



Picture 2

This picture shows a poorly adjusted head restraint.

Even though the top of the head restraint is level with the top of the occupant's head, a large gap exists between the back of the occupant's head and the head restraint.

This gap – which is marked using the yellow arrow – means that the head can move and tilt further back, increasing the risk of injury.

Examples of Properly and Poorly Adjusted Head Restraints



Picture 3

This picture shows another example of a properly adjusted head restraint.

As in Picture 1, the two main points to note are that the head restraint is as high as the top of the occupant's head, and the restraint is close to the back of the head.



Picture 4

This picture is an example of a poorly adjusted head restraint.

The yellow arrow shows the distance between the top of the occupant's head and the top of the head restraint, which would increase the risk of an injury.

The head restraint should be moved higher in order to adjust it correctly, as shown in picture 3.