

The Road to Recovery

*Getting the Most out of your
Post-Car Accident Care*

Courtesy of The Vital Compass
A Cooperatively Owned
Chinese Medicine Pharmacy + Clinic



The Vital Compass and You

This book was written for those who were able to walk away from a car accident. However, if you have sustained a more serious injury, we can't stress enough how important it is to receive regular therapy. Even if you have had surgery, or have been hospitalized, we encourage you to be proactive, as there can be many stages to the recovery process. We're here to guide you through them with the best possible care!

The Vital Compass is a cooperatively owned and run clinic and herbal medicinalary serving North Portland in Oregon and beyond. Each of our practitioners is highly qualified to provide acupuncture support, orthopedic massage, and herbal prescriptions for pain relief and speedy recovery.

As you'll discover in this book, Chinese Medicine supports the body's innate ability to heal itself, and therefore is appropriate for any number of conditions, physical and emotional in nature. In fact, our patients find other long-standing complaints disappear when getting regular treatments for their injuries!

Our shop is open 7 days a week. Please feel free to call or drop in and we'll answer any questions you may have. In addition to custom-tailored formulas, we also sell over-the-counter patches, balms, and liniments which can help with pain relief and improve recovery time!

What's the Big Deal?

In 1899, a New York City cab driver named Jacob German was said to have driven down Lexington avenue at the “reckless” speed of 12 mph.

Sure, you laugh now. We travel 60, 70, 85 mph with barely any air between ourselves and the cars around us. But if you travel at 12 mph and run head-on into the concrete strut of a highway overpass, say, or a huge redwood tree, you might not think 12 mph is all that slow. Think about what it feels like to accidentally bang your knee on something that has no “give,” like a fire hydrant. It’s painful, right? Right.

To put things into perspective, the average human walks at about 3 mph. The world record holder for running the mile goes about 16 mph; for the 100 meter dash, 23 mph. But here we are, flying down the highway—a blur to Jacob German!—and we don’t give it a second thought.

If you think about it, our bodies were never designed to move that fast—or worse, go from moving that fast, to not moving at all in no seconds flat.

And that’s what a car accident can do. And that’s why they are so jarring to the body.

What does it Mean to Get into an Accident?

Thrown off, out, and around

Obviously people first think of the physical consequences of a car accident. It’s true that you’ll never know how thankful you

can be until you've gotten into a car accident and are able to walk away from it.

But car accidents are scary and jarring, and one of the times in your life when you are so shaken up that you can't think straight. As one of our patients said, "The car stopped, and my spirit went flying through the windshield and landed on the pavement." Across the board, people report being thrown off their game, feeling unsettled, caught off guard, and disoriented, even at very low impact collisions.

Emotional & Cognitive Impairment

What might I feel after an accident?

- Depression
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Can't think clearly
- Foggy-headedness
- Lack of motivation
- Forgetfulness

A lot of this is from the surprise of the accident, but don't forget that our brains are getting sloshed around inside our skulls, whether there is a concussion to the head or not.

It's a mess, so don't mess around

If you've already gotten into an accident before, you may not need convincing that it is a big deal. Therefore you need to waste no time in receiving the proper care.

Step 1 is getting evaluated for injuries, ideally from someone who specializes in motor vehicle accidents. You are able to see a Licensed Acupuncturist (LAc) immediately for treatment and evaluation without a referral or prescription, but we recommend joint care with one of the following professionals:

a chiropractor (look for the DC after their name), an osteopath (DO), or a doctor specializing in orthopedic care (MD).

Be aware that you may feel OK after your accident, but the pain and inflammation from the injuries will surface long after the accident.

It's often more prudent to tell the auto insurance company that you are opening an injury claim, whether or not you use it, than to tell them that you walked away without harm.

You may also want to be evaluated regularly as your symptoms change and your pain levels fluctuate, in addition to the initial exam.

What we take for granted

Even if you have no cuts, breaks, bruises or fractures, the pain from such an accident can be incredibly disruptive to your life. You may find out that your “Activities of Daily Living” are affected at every turn. You can’t lift things the way you used to, or brush your teeth, or stand, or sit, or walk, or even sleep in the same way. You may even find yourself scared to get back in your vehicle and drive.

And this is one of the times in your life when you simply need to take a deep breath and tell yourself that you **MUST** do everything you can to get better.

Don’t put off getting the proper care from a professional who knows bodies. If you do, your injuries may become chronic, which means the pain and scarring will be with you for the rest of your life.

Get help when you need it

Carla had chronic low back pain when she got hit from behind, a low-impact fender-bender. She had been managing her pain with yoga and exercise, but the accident caused her to lose her ability to walk long distances or carry heavy things.

Carla was afraid that her back pain would be considered a pre-existing condition, but she is still eligible to be covered for treatments under her automobile insurance health coverage.

Why Acupuncture Helps with Car Accident Injuries

Read on, and you'll find out how much a car accident can affect our lives, physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. And that makes acupuncture the ideal choice for post-accident care.

Acupuncture and herbs treat the whole body. And as our bodies change from day to day, every session is tailored to treat your unique concerns at that time. It also calms the nervous system, improves sleep when healing happens best, and of course, it treats pain, alleviates inflammation of the injured tissues, and increases circulation of blood flow to the areas that need it most.

Here are some great tidbits to know about our medicine and how to heal properly:

Stress and Healing

Stress impedes healing. According to the Immunology and Allergy Clinics of North America, psychological stress affects wound healing by restricting flow through constricted blood vessels, triggering inflammation, and impeding proper signaling of chemical messengers involved in the healing process.¹

Narcotic Pain medications are addictive and over-prescribed

In 2012, about 1 in 4 Oregonians received an opioid prescription — more than 900,000 people. And the Oregon Pain Management Commission says this treatment approach is expensive to tax payers and is not producing desired outcomes.²

Relief without the side effects

An acupuncture trial in

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Acupuncture helps with compression injuries for people with osteoporosis

Not everyone who gets into a car accident has healthy bones, and that's not your fault. If you have osteoporosis, as many post-menopausal women do, acupuncture can help with pain and activities of daily living, according to a study done at The Boston Spine Group at Tufts University Medical School.⁶

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Bone tissue in Chinese Medicine is part of the Kidney organ system, which begins to decline as we age. And one in four post-menopausal women will experience compression fractures.

So not only can acupuncture and herbs help with the pain, but also improve kidney and bone health.

Accidents are Messy

Any number of factors can complicate an injury and how well you are able to heal. As I said, it's not just how fast you're going, but how big the difference is between how fast you're going and how fast the other vehicle is going.

So, if you're traveling fast and you hit a stationary vehicle, your *deceleration*, or reduction in speed, is extreme. If you're standing still and you get hit from behind, your *acceleration*, or increase in speed, is excessive.

Not all accidents are the same

(What makes your injuries different from others.)

The difference in size of your vehicles (Remember the saying, "I felt like I got hit by a Mack Truck"? Same thing.)

Which angle you are hit from (Some joints in your body just don't like to move in certain ways.)

How strong and flexible your body is (OK. *Some people's* joints just don't like to move in certain ways.)

If you have any old injuries (That's likely one of the spots that will hurt most after the accident.)

What position your body was in at the moment of impact (Was your body twisted as you were looking over your shoulder?).

Why are Auto Accident Injuries Different from Other Injuries?

Many of us think that being seat-belted or having an airbag is enough to save us from serious injury. Hut the impact with the seatbelt or airbag is jarring too! Maybe not as jarring as flying through the windshield, but still bad enough to cause pain, inflammation and damage to the tissues.

So what happens is that you have tearing of ligaments, tendons, and muscles, a "pinching" of those tissues between vertebrae or other joints, overstretching of non-elastic tissues, and bruising from impact of head against the side window, the seatbelt across the chest and ribcage, or the airbag to the head and neck. A twisted body or impact from an angle will cause the body to move in a plane that is unusual for it to move in, especially during a jarring impact.

What is whiplash?

When you are hit, you accelerate quickly and lurch in one direction...that is, until your body is stopped, at which point it decelerates quickly. Thus the technical term acceleration-deceleration injury is used. The chest and waist hit the seatbelt, and the head can hit the windshield or side window. When the head snaps back, the brain collides with the inside of the skull. This type of movement can be responsible for injury to the brain and nervous system, as well as sprains, strains, fractures of the spine, and hyperextension of the tendons and ligaments.

Is it really that bad or can I just walk it off?

Even a fender bender can cause significant injury to your body. Most people think that if they can walk away from a car accident that they'll just heal on their own, perhaps with the

help of a few ibuprofen. But most of the time, this is NOT the case, and you should be prepared for the following:

pain and bruising in all parts of your body, including places you had no idea experienced impact feelings of depression, irritability, anxiety, sadness, and fatigue symptoms that will surface long after the accident
a long period of recovery, months or longer
vulnerabilities in the body where a small fall or hit can set you back pains that go away, then return with more intensity
new pains that emerge in places you never imagined were involved popping in joints or poor body mechanics due to pain or the overstretching of the ligaments

So Here's Your Plan

Anyone who's been in an accident needs to be educated, aware, and willing. That means educated about your choices and your rights, aware of your

Why do I hurt everywhere?

Any place your body contacts the car has potential for injury, and that jolt can travel up to other joints along the limb:

Hand on the stick shift causing hand, wrist, elbow, forearm, or shoulder pain
The foot on the clutch or brake can cause foot, ankle, knee, hip, and low back pain
Again, the seatbelt across the chest, while lifesaving, creates an odd cross-wise impact for the torso that can affect the upper, mid, and lower back, as well as the ribcage and internal organs in the abdominal cavity.

body's limitations, and willing to do what you need to get better and advocate for yourself.

Get an Examination

As soon as possible after your accident, have your head, neck, and back evaluated for neurological impairment or concussion. Symptoms may include radiating pain, numbness, tingling and/or weakness of the extremities, blurry vision, speech or motor impairment, inability to think clearly, and/or bowel or urinary incontinence. Therefore it has to be said: Get an immediate physical exam from a chiropractor (also known as a Doctor of Chiropractic—look for the initials DC after the name), a Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), or a physician specializing in orthopedic care (MD).

This initial exam will also check for range-of-motion limitations. Take note, yourself of where/how much it hurts, and in general establish a baseline record of your condition that future progress can be compared against.

Get treatment for the inflammation with Acupuncture and Herbs

Your first weeks following an accident are the best time to seek treatment that alleviates inflammation, relieves muscle spasms, and reduces shock and the emotional distress that can impede healing.

Acupuncture does this and herbal therapy is an excellent accompaniment at this time because it can also promote circulation and reduce inflammation.

What about massage? you ask. That should feel good, right? And I've heard that chiropractic work is really beneficial. After all, I just saw my chiropractor for the exam! This is all true, but it's important to be aware of the need to rest and wait for the inflammation to go down before receiving deeper forms of bodywork.

So at the beginning, you need to be sure to rest as much as possible and avoid a lot of physical activity or lifting. Your body

Rest-Ice-Compression-Elevation

Or RICE, once considered the go-to therapy for injury, has recently been found to be ineffective, and even harmful.

Generally ice is good for acute inflammatory response: redness, swelling, and heat, which most often occur within 24–48 hours of an injury or reinjury. If you don't have this, then ice is just numbing the pain and at the same time constricting the blood vessels and impeding blood flow and healing. In contrast, acupuncture and herbs reduce inflammation without the side-effects of ice.

So give it a break and favor heat therapy to encourage circulation and healing. If you feel like you've "flared" an old injury, then use ice sparingly and alternate it with heat.⁷

systems are especially vulnerable at this time, so even if you feel OK, try not to jump quickly into your previous exercise routine or physical activity.

Track your progress

During this whole experience, it's important to track your symptoms in a notebook or on your phone—something you always have with you—as your symptoms will change.

Pay special attention to the limitations in your Activities of Daily Living, things like carrying groceries, getting dressed, brushing your teeth, driving, walking, standing, sitting, bending, reaching, sleeping, etc. How are your range of motion and strength affected?

It's a cruel fact of doing business that the insurance companies care more about these Activities of Daily Living than whether you're in pain, as they are regarded as objective markers of your improvement, and will affect how much care you are awarded. There's more about this in the next section.

"What can't you do?"

This is a common question among insurance companies and the independent medical examiners (IMEs) hired to evaluate your condition.

Their ultimate goal is to find out if you are capable of working and performing necessary day-to-day tasks, *whether or not you are in pain*. They will ask about your pain levels, but ultimately will withdraw care if you are considered "functioning."

Can I get bodywork now?

After about two to four weeks, most of the swelling and inflammation will have receded, the spasm will have softened, and structural alignment and integration will be possible. Now is a great time to have your chiropractor visits as well as massage and structural integration therapy. This is also when you should begin to incorporate gentle stretches into your daily routine and reduce your pain-reliever use, ideally to zero. It has been shown that long-term anti-inflammatory use can inhibit the body's innate healing mechanisms.

Did you know?

There are herbs that can provide excellent pain relief without the dangers to your body's organs? After your consult with us, we can prescribe a custom blend of herbs to reduce pain, relieve spasm and increase circulation, depending on the nature of your injuries and your individual constitution.

Auto Insurance Coverage

Every state is different in terms of what kind of healthcare coverage is included in automobile insurance. In Oregon, a minimum of \$15,000 is available to anyone requiring medical attention following an accident. Claims can be filed for more than this if the other driver is found to be at fault.

What this means is that treatments are covered if medically necessary. And this is where proper examination and progress tracking are most important, and why it's important to see health professionals who know what they're doing.

This is because insurance companies don't understand pain and injury. They only understand the bottom line; that is, how much they are paying out for your physical and emotional injuries. Therefore professionals and allies in the medical field are necessary at every step of the process.

How insurance companies decide if you're making progress

Your level or intensity of pain: Usually a pain scale is used to gauge how a body part is feeling, 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst possible pain.

The frequency of pain: How often do you feel it? Three times per day, for example? Or is it constant but has fluctuations in intensity?

The duration of pain: When the pain comes, how long does it last? If you cause the pain to flare up by lifting a box, does the pain stop when you put the box down, or does it last for a while?

The quality of pain: Is it dull achy or sharp and stabbing? Sharper is considered more severe.

Activities of Daily Living: Insurance Companies or third party evaluators will often ask: What can't you do? because they are more interested in how functional your body is and if you can return to work.

Are you and your care providers tracking these changes in your symptoms? Pain can fluctuate, which is why it is so important to track from day to day. Accurate charting, reporting, and the importance of keeping a daily log of symptoms cannot be stressed enough.

Lastly, insurance companies expect faster progress when you are receiving regular care. If you are getting care from 3 professionals at a given time--an acupuncturist, a chiropractor, and a massage therapist, for example--that can add up to 5 treatments per week. Therefore they will be following up with you sooner than later. It may feel like harassment to you, but all you need to do is be clear and honest about your rate of progress.

Should I consult a lawyer first?

While we all make mistakes when driving, if the other driver is at fault, you'll find that their car insurance company will want to settle with you for the "pain and suffering" you've experienced (This is separate from the medical bills they're paying). That means they want to pay you a flat fee in exchange for your agreement never to sue their client.

But whatever you do, DO NOT have this conversation with the other driver's car insurance company until after you've run your course of treatments and feel like your healing is all but complete. If you're unsure, it never hurts to get a lawyer. This is also true if you feel as though your care is being withdrawn before you feel stable enough to continue the healing process on your own.

CASE STUDY: A simple settlement

Sky was contacted by the other driver's insurance company the day after their accident when they were feeling pretty good and happy to have walked away from it without any major injuries. The insurance company informed them that it was accepting blame and offered a settlement of \$500. Sky thought that was more than enough because of how good they were feeling.

What do you think? Was this a good decision on Sky's part? See the next page for the outcome of Sky's case.

Wishing you all the best in your path to healing!

Getting into a car accident is never easy. Your body hurts, and maybe you feel guilty or angry, regardless of whose fault it is. So this is the time to be patient with yourself, patient with your body, patient with the bureaucracy of insurance, and patient with the others involved in the accident.

And never try to go through this alone. Find friends or family who can be there for you, and know there are lots of skilled and knowledgeable practitioners out there who can help.

And if it's covered by your policy and you need it, use it, and don't feel guilty about it. A doctor's prescription for these treatments may be required, so check with your insurance company, and then find a doctor who is an advocate of an integrative team-care approach to healing.

I just got into an accident!

CASE STUDY: The outcome of Sky's settlement

As you may have guessed, all the pain and bruising from Sky's injury started showing itself not long after, and the \$500 didn't even cover the cost of the gas getting to and from appointments, let alone the hours lost in transit, getting treated, and going to the gym for the next two years to stretch and strengthen their body. Sky would have been much better off waiting until after all of their treatments were finished before settling.

What do I do?

If you've just gotten into an accident, your priority is to STAY SAFE!

Assess the situation for your immediate safety, which means staying in your car if there is a risk of injury or if moving might put you at risk of further injury. Move to a safe location if your car is creating a safety hazard or obstructing traffic. But most of all, do not leave the scene of the accident!

If there are any serious injuries, call 911 immediately to report the accident and get help to the scene, if needed, and follow any instructions the police give you.

If it's a minor fender bender, with minimal injury and/or damage to your vehicles, do the following and use the next two pages to collect all the information you need to file a claim.

Be courteous and polite, but do not admit fault.

Provide your name and insurance information to the police and to other driver(s).

If your car is inoperable, request a tow through your insurance company, if it's included in your policy coverage. Note the name of the tow company and location to which your vehicle is towed.

Call your insurance company when you get home. Follow any instructions given to you by your agent.

Print this out and fill it out!

Date: _____ Time: _____ PM/AM Day: _____

Weather and traffic conditions: _____

Description of injuries and damage: _____

The Vital Compass located @ 5412 N Williams in Portland, Oregon

www.thevitalcompass.com

971.373.8378

Details of police or emergency involvement: _____

OTHER DRIVER INFORMATION:

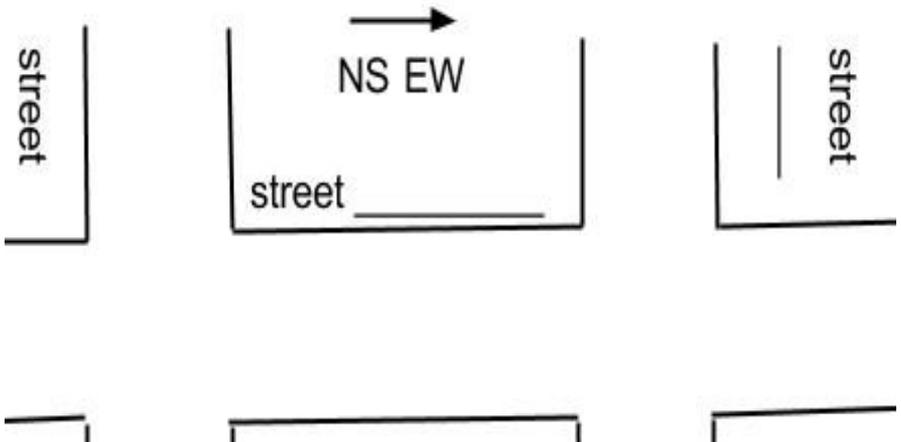
CAR #1	CAR #2
Driver:	Driver:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Car Insurance Co: and Policy No.	Car Insurance Co: and Policy No.
Driver's License Issuing State: And License No.:	Driver's License Issuing State: And License No.:
Car Make: Model: Year: Color: License Plate No:	Car Make: Model: Year: Color: License Plate No:

WITNESS (If applicable):

Name:

Phone:

Draw accident & label the cars. Fill in street names and circle N, S, E, W for arrow direction



If you have a smart phone or camera, take photos to document the scene if it is safe to do so. Include pictures of:

License plates of involved vehicles.

Damage to your vehicle.

Damage to other vehicles.

Damage to property other than vehicles.

Objects at the scene, including accident debris, skid marks, fallen branches, etc.

Street signs or other landmarks to identify the accident location.

Any contributing factors to the accident, such as obscured traffic signs.

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The Road to Recovery

You have one body and it needs to last you your whole life. Therefore you want to keep it happy and healthy for as long as possible. And the way to have the best healing experience is to be evaluated and treated in the right order by professionals who can perform physical exams and report recommendations properly.

"Getting into a car accident is never easy. Your body hurts, and maybe you feel guilty or angry, regardless of whose fault it is. So this is the time to be patient with yourself, patient with your body, patient with the bureaucracy of insurance, and patient with the others involved in the accident."

“A must read! I never would have gotten through this experience without this book and the wonderful practitioners at The Vital Compass!”

- RL, Dog walker & accident survivor

This book will take you through all the stages of a motor vehicle accident and how to get your body in the best possible shape!