

10 Things to Do After a Bicycle Accident

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Safety is paramount when riding a bicycle, but no matter how safety conscious you are the odds are against you - cars far outnumber two-wheelers in Los Angeles. At some point, you or a fellow rider may be in an accident involving a motorist. Knowing what to do in the immediate aftermath can make a difference in how well you protect your rights, or those of a companion who may be severely injured. The following checklist can help you maintain control and preserve critical information:

1. Wait for the Police to Arrive

You and the motorist involved in the accident are legally obligated to remain at the scene if there have been injuries or property damage. Even if you believe you have not been injured, wait for the police to arrive. You may not realize you've been injured until later. Once you have left the scene, it may be impossible to track down the motorist.

2. Never Negotiate with the Motorist

Don't negotiate with the driver even if he or she apologizes and accepts the blame. You may not be aware of the full extent of your injuries and damage to your bike, and the driver may change his or her mind later and deny the accident.

3. Obtain Driver Information

Exchange information with the motorist, including: name, address, phone number, driver's license number, license plate number, make of car and insurance policy number.

4. Obtain Witness Contact Information

Write down the names and phone numbers of witnesses.

5. Document What Happened

Remember every detail about the accident: when, where and how it happened, and road, traffic and weather conditions. As soon as possible, write everything down. Draw maps or diagrams showing the position and direction of everyone involved. You should include streets, signs and traffic lights. As general advice, carry a cell phone with a camera whenever riding. Visual documentation can be important.

6. Make Sure the Police Take Your Report

Police are sometimes more concerned with recording a motorist's version of events than a cyclist's. Make sure your statement of what occurred is included in the report. Report any injury, no matter how minor it may seem (it may develop into something major later on). If you cannot get your statement included in the report at the scene, you can ask to have the report modified later. In any case, get the accident report number and write it down. Note the name and the badge number of the police officer who takes the report.

7. Seek Immediate Medical Attention and Document Your Injuries

Even if your injuries are minor, consult a doctor immediately and get a written evaluation. Have photos taken of injuries and record symptoms for several days.

8. Preserve Evidence

Keep any damaged clothing and don't wash it. Keep damaged bike parts and do not have your bike repaired. If it is absolutely necessary to have it repaired, take photos first and get a written document of the damages.

9. Never Negotiate with Insurance Companies

The driver's insurance company may call you and attempt to settle before you have all the information ready to make a case. Don't negotiate directly with any insurance company.

10. Seek Advice from a Professional

Don't contact your insurance company before talking to a personal injury attorney experienced in bicycle accident cases. Insurance companies may use anything you say against you later. An attorney can negotiate with insurance companies on your behalf, hire a bicycle accident expert to investigate the accident, and represent you in a lawsuit if necessary.

Remember that as a bicyclist you have the same rights and responsibilities as the drivers of motor vehicles. Drivers need to respect the rights of bicyclists and be mindful of sharing the road and avoiding accidents, but it is also your responsibility to take the proper steps after an accident to make sure your rights are protected.