

Auto Safety Features

According to “The Unofficial DMV Guide” website at www.dmv.org, automakers constantly strive to improve or add safety features to their cars each year, aiming for four-or-five star crash-test ratings (and thus more auto sales). Here are a few we like:

1. **Cargo Nets.** If you've got an open trunk space (mini-van, station wagon, SUV) then use this to prevent all your junk from flying into you during an accident (or during the avoidance of one).
2. **Airbags Galore.** Side-impact airbags that protect the body are mostly standard these days, but now there's an added feature: they can sense the passengers' height, weight, and position (such as leaning forward to the glove box) as well as speed, and adjust their impact accordingly. **Side curtain airbags** (aka head curtain) guard your head, and should also be an important part of your airbag checklist.
3. **Stabilize Yourself.** A Stability Control system's sensors can tell which way the car's driver is headed vs. which way the car's actually going. A sister system is the Rollover Prevention System (variously known by different names) which brakes your car if you're in danger of rolling.
4. **A Sensitive Touch.** A parents' worst nightmare is a toddler who learns how to open a door and runs out behind a backing-up car. Two things can help: sensors in the back, which beep when you're close to an object (also helps for tight parking spots) and a rearview camera. A rearview camera actually gives you a picture of what's behind you, so there's no question of whether that's a bike or your baby. Oh, yeah, and these help with parking, too.
5. **Tire-pressure Monitoring.** A well-filled tire is one of the most basic, most important, and most overlooked safety feature there is, so most new cars now come with this feature. Some cars chirp at you or have a lighted symbol when pressure's low; whatever the method, get thee to a filling station and add air.
6. **Wake Me Up? Before You Crash.** Changing lanes without checking your blind spots and sleepy driving are two major accident-causers. When you turn on your signal, some cars "look" in your blind spot for you and warn you if there's something there. By the same token, if you have a little lane drift WITHOUT turning on your signal, the lane-departure warning will sound an alarm.
7. **Stop Me.** We all use cruise control on long trips, but sometimes it's hard to remember to turn it off (or to do it in time) if traffic suddenly slows. Adaptive Cruise Control brakes for you; if you think everything's okay, you just tap the brake yourself. Emergency Brake Assist is a similar system, which recognizes a panic stop and helps you out.
8. **Night Vision Assist.** Though this sounds like something a soldier would have more than your car, night vision assist (aka adaptive headlights) has cropped up. This cool technology shows you a picture of that thing standing in the middle of the road at night. The system can also adjust how long the light

beams are and know if there's extra light around, putting more or less light on the subject as needed.

9. **Emergency Response.** This system calls for help when you can't. It also does stuff like unlocks the doors, switches off the fuel, and disconnects the battery when the airbags go off.
10. **Buy the Safest Car You Can.** You've got three kids and a couple of their friends and you can't fit into a sedan, so you're thinking about getting an SUV. Do you really need one? Are you going off-roading this weekend, or is your off-roading confined to toting the kids to the soccer field? SUVs are big and high and lots of people like them, but the fact remains they tend to roll over a lot more than the other family stand-bys, the mini-van and the station wagon. Plus, they get worse gas mileage. Just something to think about.