

The Chicken May Have Gotten Across the Road, But What About You?

Why would you have to think about something as simple as walking? Putting one foot in front of another would seem to take care of itself, right? Wrong. It might be in an ideal world, where everyone looks out for one another, but real life is a different story. Every year in the U.S., 100,000 people are injured while walking, and 6,700 of them die. In the last five years, 37 Sailors and Marines were killed while walking.

The safest places to walk are on sidewalks. If there is no sidewalk and you have to walk on the road, keep to the left and walk facing traffic, so you won't be surprised by cars coming up behind you.

Cross the road at marked crosswalks and pedestrian crosswalks at intersections. It's up to you to yield the right-of-way to vehicles when crossing the road. However, the pedestrian has the right-of-way within a marked crosswalk or an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection.

However, even when the light is green and signal says, "Walk," you can't always depend on drivers to respect the rights of pedestrians. Many crashes occur at intersections, so be sure to stop at the curb, look left-right-left, and be especially alert for turning vehicles.

Also, watch out for red-light runners. Drivers who run red lights cause nearly 260,000 crashes a year. About 750 of these are fatal, and the number is rising. Make sure all vehicles are fully stopped before you enter a crosswalk.

When walking in parking lots or past driveways, be sure to look for backup lights on cars. Drivers don't always look for pedestrians before backing out of a driveway or parking space.

Be careful not to walk too close to the road. It's not easy to judge the speed of oncoming cars, especially on high-speed roads. People have been killed standing in the road when their cars were disabled, working on their cars, or trying to flag down others for help.

At intersections where right turn on red is permitted, always look for turning cars before crossing. Many motorists turn without looking for pedestrians crossing their paths and ignore laws requiring them to yield or stop for pedestrians in crosswalks.

Drivers need to see you to avoid you. Just because one car in a string of traffic stops to let you pass doesn't mean other drivers know you're there. Make eye contact with drivers when crossing in traffic and stay out of the driver's blind spot.

During the day, brightly colored clothing makes it easier for drivers to see you, but at night, it's harder to be seen. Over half of all pedestrian deaths happen after dark. Stay on well-lit streets, carry a flashlight, and trim your clothing with reflective tape that you can get at a fabric, sporting goods or hardware store. At night, you may be contending with drowsy or tired drivers who are not as alert as they should be, so you need to take special care. In bad weather, give drivers and yourself time to maneuver safely. Don't let your umbrella or the hood of your jacket block your view of oncoming traffic. ❏

