



Riverview Clinic

Osteopathic Information Service

Keep moving

It's not just the driver who can stiffen up in a car. Passengers are often seated for long periods of time in a fixed position.

Movement is the key for car, driver and passenger.

As a passenger, try to alter your position from time to time and sit with your knees bent and thighs level and comfortable. Avoid sitting with your legs crossed; move them regularly.

For driver and passengers, stop regularly, ideally once an hour, especially when feeling tired. Get out of your vehicle and walk around it several times.

Stretch like a cat, gently moving your arms around, bringing your knees up to your hips, and stretching your whole body.

Back pain sufferers

- Choose a car, with an adjustable lumbar support (and use it). Alternatively, keep a small cushion in the car to support your lower back.
- Choose a car with a higher kerb height to make getting in and out less stressful on the spine.
- Depressing the clutch increases the pressure on your back so choose an automatic to avoid this.
- Power steering also significantly reduces the load on the spine.

Driving can give you...

- Neck Pain
- Headaches
- Eyestrain
- Shoulder Pain
- Wrist Pain

- Elbow Pain
- Back Pain
- Bottom Ache
- Hip Pain
- Knee Pain
- Foot and Ankle Pain

Is the car the right fit for you?

Sometimes, the design of the car itself can lead to back problems. If you have to drive particularly long distances, check out the cabin and layout of the controls with the four tests set out on the next page.

If the car can pass these four simple tests then there is a good chance that it is suitable for the particular driver. By using these tests a prospective buyer can make an informed choice of car and hopefully avoid 'driver's back pain'.

The five tests

1. The Praying Test – The driver places both hands together, pointing forwards. If the steering wheel is not offset then the driver should be pointing straight at the centre of the wheel. The danger of having an offset wheel is that most drivers tend to rotate the middle of the spine to compensate for its position, producing long term back strain.

2. The Fist Test – With the seat in the normal driving position make a fist with the left hand keeping the thumb to the side of the index finger. It should be possible to insert the fist on the crown of the head. If it is only just possible to insert the flat of the hand between the roof and the head then there is insufficient headroom. The danger of having too little headroom is that the driver may compensate for the lack of height by slouching in the seat which puts a strain on the spine and thighs.

3. The Look Down Test – With both hands placed evenly on the steering wheel look down at the legs. It should be possible to see equal amounts of both legs between the arms. Frequently the left leg will be visible but the right leg will be obscured by the right arm which may indicate that the shoulder girdle is rotated to the left in relation to the pelvis.

4. The Right Leg Test – This test should be performed after driving the car for a short while. Once again, look down and examine the position of the right leg. Is it elevated above the level of the left or has it fallen out towards the edge of the seat? Is the right foot roughly in line with the thigh as it should be, or has it had to come across towards the centre of the car?

5. The Kerb Height Test – Swing the right leg out of the car as though getting out, and place the right foot on the ground. Try and ensure the lower leg (shin and calf) is in a vertical position. Now look at the surface of the right thigh. It should be sloping down towards the knee. If it is sloping upwards (i.e. if the knee is higher than the hip) you will have difficulty when exiting this vehicle. If the car can pass these 5 simple tests there is

a good chance that it is suitable for that particular driver. By utilising the tests, a prospective purchaser should be able to produce a short list of suitable vehicles, from which they can then make a choice.

When driving

Car seats can be adjusted to suit your posture but make sure that you always:

1. Keep your seat reasonably upright, leaning backwards only at a slight angle.
2. Keep the headrest adjusted so that the centre of the headrest is level with your eyes. Don't set the headrest too low as this can allow more serious injury in an accident.
3. When getting in, sit first then swing your legs into the car. When you get out, move the seat back before swinging your legs out.
4. Do you 'ride the clutch', resting your foot in the air? No wonder your ankles or calf muscles hurt.
5. To relax, raise your shoulders to your ears breathing in, and then lower them as you breathe out. You may want to do this at every red traffic light, or major junction.
6. Avoid reaching behind to get bags from the rear seat. Don't be lazy. Get out and open the door.
7. Be careful when loading and unloading. Lift correctly.
8. Avoid lifting unnecessary weights. Get help to change a tyre.
9. Sit with arms gently bent at the elbow to the wheel and don't lean forward out of the seat.
10. Wear a seat belt and make sure it is properly adjusted. Make sure children also have appropriate seat belts and cushions.

Remember

- Prevention is better than cure.
- Sit properly, drive relaxed.
- Osteopaths can advise on posture.
- Osteopaths treat neck and back pain – and a great many other things as well.
- If you are unlucky enough to be involved in a road accident osteopathy can help relieve the pain of injury, especially whiplash-type injuries.
- Osteopaths are often asked by solicitors to write medico-legal reports on accident victims, to help them claim compensation.

