



### **Driving (*for work or fun*) Can Contribute to the Development of Repetitive Strain Injuries:**

Driving in a vehicle for long distances can contribute to lower and upper back and neck pain, poor circulation in the legs and buttocks and a long-term potential for degeneration of spinal discs and disc herniation. Whether you drive for work or you are headed out on a fun road-trip with your family and friends, remembering some important tips can help reduce strain and sprain and keep your mind on the road (rather than on your sore muscles).

Pain and injury is preventable. The first step is to recognize the risk factors in your daily vacation activities. Your biggest risk is sitting in an awkward posture for long periods of time (i.e. leaning to the side on the armrest or door, sitting on a wallet, forward reaching to access the steering wheel), and vehicle vibration.

To identify whether you are at risk of Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) when driving or riding in a car, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I slouch when I drive?
2. Is my head pushed forward from a ponytail at the back of my head or the headrest?
3. Is my low back supported properly?
4. Am I driving for more than 2 hours at a time without taking a break?
5. Am I bending and twisting to lift things out of my vehicle (i.e. suitcases)?
6. Do I lift heavy items out of my vehicle (i.e. suitcases, car seats, etc.)?
7. Is the lack of vehicle maintenance contributing to excessive vibration?
8. Am I pushing and/or pulling heavy items soon after driving (i.e. strollers)?

## Here Are Some Great Tips for Comfortable Driving:

1. **Drive Safe and Aware.** Put all distractions away, including your cell phone!



## 2. **Adjust Your Seat:**

- I. Tilt your backrest slightly back from vertical (to approximately 100-110 degrees). Tilting your seat too far forward may increase the strain on your low back; tilting it too far back could increase the strain on your shoulders as it will cause you to reach further forward to access the steering wheel and will increase slouching.
- II. It is best if your seat angle can be such that your knees are at approximately the same height as your hips. Having knees much higher than your hips puts stress on your lower back. If your seat angle cannot change, consider sitting on a wedge or a seat cushion to raise your butt up.
- III. Ensure you have good lumbar support to fit your low back. If your vehicle is not equipped with lumbar technology consider using a portable lumbar support:
  - A. A small narrow cushion or a rolled up towel can help support your low back in a curved position. Anderson Ergonomics Consulting sells a small one (11" long, 5" wide and 2" deep) that works very well for most people.



- B. A larger product, such as the Obus Forme Low Back Backrest Support comes with a Velcro-backed Lumbar Cushion that can be moved to hit just the right spot and is approximately 17-1/2" wide x 20" high. *Important:* this is not a good product if your seat is already not deep enough for your legs as its thickness will move you forward on the seat and further away from the headrest.



3. **Avoid a Forward Head Posture:** If you have a ponytail or a clip in the back of your hair, consider removing it so it doesn't cause your head to be pushed forward of your shoulders. Ensure your headrest doesn't push you forward either.
4. **Sit on the Seat, Not on your Wallet:** Remove your wallet from your back pocket. The

wallet causes your spine to misalign and puts undue stress on it.

5. **Adjust Your Steering Wheel:** Tilt your steering wheel to enable you to keep your elbows down and close to your sides while driving. Reaching for your wheel can aggravate upper back and shoulder muscles.



6. **Take Breaks:** Stop the vehicle every 2 hours and take a 15 minute break from sitting to stand up and walk around.
  7. **Don't Twist:** Exit your vehicle by turning your body, hips and legs to the open door, putting both feet on the ground before you stand up.
  8. **Stretch before Lifting:** Avoid lifting immediately after a long drive. Sitting causes the ligaments that support your spine to stretch and the discs in your back to move out of their optimal position. Wait at least 2-3 minutes before lifting anything after a long drive to help reduce the chance of straining your back.
  9. **Lift with Your Legs, Not Your Back:** When lifting, make sure you bring the load close to you before you lift it. Pull it towards you on the seat, slide it up on the front edge of the trunk, etc. to get it as close as possible.
  10. **Get a Tune Up:** Ensure your vehicle is properly maintained to minimize vibration.
-

**A few exercises you can do while driving:**



***Lumbar Press Instructions:** While sitting, press your lower back (lumber area) into the seat, rounding your spine forward. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Relax and repeat twice more.*



***Lumbar Arch Instructions:** While sitting up straight, arch your lower back, exaggerating the lumbar curve. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Relax and repeat twice more.*

Please ensure that you are capable of doing these stretches safely prior to trying them in a moving vehicle.

You may feel tension and tightness while performing these stretches, but **you should not feel pain**. If you feel pain, back off the stretches a little until they feel more comfortable. If you have a current injury or feel uncomfortable doing either of these stretches, please check with your caregiver prior to continuing these exercises to ensure they are appropriate for you.

These are extremely beneficial stretches for your lower back when you are unable to stand and stretch. They are a great way to change your posture and help to prevent a repetitive strain injury from occurring.

**Request a copy of our Stretching Tips for Drivers for a series of excellent stretches to do in your vehicle while driving!**

- Written by Sebrina Fystro, Ergonomics Consultant