

When having pain, we need to examine all the aspects of our lives that can contribute. Driving creates significant stress to the neck and the upper and lower back. While this should go without saying, only use cars that you fit into properly. Compact cars often do not fit taller users. For others, certain seats may not support them properly. Safety is always the first concern. Never make an adjustment that would make you less likely to see the road, your mirrors, or the instruments easily.

The Proper Seat Adjustment:

Step One: It is easiest to start with a seat that is completely in the wrong position and bring it into the correct position. Start by pushing your seat all the way back, place it as low to the floor as able, and recline the back 30-40 degrees.

Step Two: Bring the seat height up until you can comfortably see the road and instruments and your hips are as high as your knees. If you are too low, try adding a cushion or wedge to the seat. This can also decrease vibration from the road which has been shown to contribute to injury. Be sure it does not make you too high so that you have to bend your head down or to the side.



Step Three: Scoot the seat forward so you can reach and completely depress all the foot pedals without coming away from the seat back.

Step Four: Bring the back forward until you are reclined at a 100 to 110 degree angle. This decreases the pressure on the discs in your low back. Adjust your headrest so it rests in the middle of your head. Adjust the lumbar

support so you have even back support. This should be supportive and comfortable. A lumbar cushion can be added if your car lacks sufficient lumbar support.

Step Five: Tilt seat cushion until it evenly supports your entire thigh without pressure in particular areas and does not hit the back of your knees. If it presses unevenly you can restrict circulation and cause discomfort in the legs.

Step Six: Adjust the seat belt to fit you instead of adjusting the seat to accommodate the seatbelt position.

Step Seven: Bring the steering wheel down and toward you to minimize reach. The less your elbows reach forward and up the less the strain on your neck and upper back.



Step Eight: Now adjust the mirrors. If you start to slouch down or get in a bad position, the mirrors will feel as they need to be adjusted and cue you to sit back up.

Fine tune as necessary.

Make minor adjustments to your position occasionally to change the stressors on your body. Be sure to stay in a safe supported position. Change your grip on the wheel occasionally.

Do Not Twist:

Do not use the car as an office. Using the laptop in the other seat creates twisting of the spine. Bending over to fill out paperwork causes your neck to flex forward unsafely.

Don't store items on the back seat or seat back pockets where reaching for them will cause awkward twisting.

Always remove your wallet from your back pocket before sitting. This causes the pelvis to twist stressing the back.



The Proper Way to Hold the Steering Wheel:

How you hold the steering wheel is also important. Instead of holding close to the top of the wheel at the 10 and 2 o'clock positions lower them to 9 and 3 o'clock or lower. You can feel the shoulders muscles relax some when you do this. Other than while turning, avoid reaching across your body to hold the steering wheel. For example, don't hold the very top or right side of the wheel with your left arm or vice versa. Try to keep your wrist straight while holding the steering wheel.

Tips

A Few More Tips:

Give your body a few minutes out of the car before lifting things from the trunk.

When getting in to the car, sit first and then swing your legs into the car. To get out, slide the legs out first and then stand up to decrease low back strain.

Take frequent breaks to get out and stretch at least every 2 hours. This is important for your back but also your hands as

holding a steering wheel for long periods can contribute to carpal tunnel syndrome. If you get to your destination 3 minutes earlier but are stiff and painful you won't be very effective!