

## Driving and Back Pain

Over half of drivers in the UK report that they suffer from back pain while they are in their car, and current back pain sufferers frequently report that driving makes their pain worse. As avoiding driving is often impossible, it is important to consider the factors that you can change to prevent or minimise back pain when driving.

The key to preventing back pain when in the driving seat is to find and maintain a good and comfortable posture. For this you need to ensure that your car seat allows you to adjust your position, ideally by having independently adjustable tilt and height features. The following points should be considered, especially if you are looking to purchase a new car:

### **The Seat**

- This should support the length of your spine so that you are comfortable and the curve in your lower back is maintained.
- The top of the seat should support your shoulders and allow you full rear vision.
- The seat should be wide enough so that your hips, thighs and bottom can sit comfortably.
- The depth of the seat should be long enough so that your thighs are comfortably supported, but not so deep that it puts pressure on the back of your knees.
- You must always ensure that there is a head rest, and that is positioned so that it supports the most central point of your head to help prevent serious injury in the event of whiplash.

### **The Steering Wheel**

- Choose an adjustable steering wheel so that you can find a comfortable position.
- Consider having power steering as this can help you prevent strain to your back and neck, and can also be useful if you have shoulder problems.
- Make sure the steering wheel is positioned centrally – if it is off-set it could put an additional strain on your spine.
- The steering wheel should not obstruct the display panel, and you should be able to reach the wheel while maintaining a relaxed position that is supported by the seat.

There are some important points to consider about how you sit in your car. The following information about how you can adjust the seat height and your posture will ensure that you are minimising the stress on your back when driving.

### **Seat height:**

- You need to be able to reach all of the pedals without having to strain or tilt your pelvis too much (try putting your hand in the curve of your back - if the curve moves away from your hand, or there is extra pressure through your hand, try adjusting the seat so that your spine remains in a neutral position).
- You need to have good vision of the road when your head is in a neutral position looking straight ahead. This will prevent strain on your neck.
- You should be able to reach all hand controls easily without twisting or bending sideways to reach them:

### **Sitting Posture:**

- Your spine needs to be supported by the back of the seat so that you are comfortable and are able to maintain a small curve at the base of your spine. Avoid sitting in a slouched position as this will provoke back and neck pain.
- If your lower back is insufficiently supported by the drivers seat, you could try rolling up a small towel and placing it behind the curve of your lower back for additional support.

The following are some additional points to consider when you are using your car:

- Ensure that you have a good posture and lifting technique when filling and emptying your boot and the back seats. Always try and bend from your knees rather than your back when lifting objects and children into the car, and try to avoid twisting movement as much as possible.
- No matter how correct your posture, you still need to take regular breaks from driving to stand up and stretch your back. This is important to prevent back pain from developing, and will help ease the pain if you suffer from back problems.
- Avoid doing work in your car as it is not the ideal position for writing or using a laptop, and you will end up stooping and twisting. It is better to find a more suitable office area.

Remember to always seek professional advice from your doctor or physiotherapist if you suffer from pain or discomfort when you are driving.