

Driving and back pain

If you drive fairly long distances to and from work everyday (driving for over half an hour) or your job specifically involves long hours of **driving**, you may have experienced **back pain**; and you wouldn't be alone. Approximately **30-60%** of drivers report back pain that is caused or made worse by driving. This is not uncommon as driving exposes the body to many different forces including acceleration, deceleration and most notably **vibration**. Larger heavy goods vehicle drivers are exposed to a lot of vibration and consequently this group of people report more back pain. Driving also involves the use of your feet to control the car's pedals which means they are not used to help **stabilise** and support your lower body as they normally would when sitting. A combination of these factors as well as the inadequate design of some vehicle **seats** can cause back problems for some.

Top tips

- ✓ Know your **limit** by testing how long you can drive for before your pain begins. Knowing how long will allow you to be able to take regular breaks before the pain begins
- ✓ Take **regular breaks** to move around and do back **stretches**. Also stretch **before** you begin a journey, any time it is possible and safe to do so **during** your journey and **after** the journey
- ✓ Being comfortably seated is very important when driving. Ensure your seat is adjusted so it is **comfortable** for you and if your vehicle does not have lumbar **support** seating, use a lumbar support cushion to support your back.



Below are some things to consider to ensure you are seated comfortably.

Sit with your buttocks as close as possible to the backrest - adjust the distance to the pedals so your legs are slightly bent when you press a pedal to the floor.



Adjust the seat length so your thighs are in contact with the seat almost up to the back of the knees. The distance between the edge of the seat and the back of your knees should be about two or three fingers wide.



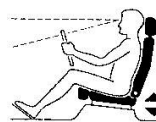
Sit with your shoulders as close as possible to the backrest. Adjust the angle of the backrest so that you can easily reach the steering wheel with your arms bent. Your shoulders should remain in contact with the backrest when you turn the steering wheel.



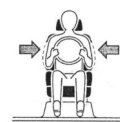
A lumbar support is properly adjusted when the natural curvature of your lower spine is fully supported.



Adjust the height of the seat to the highest comfortable position. This ensures that you will have a clear view on all sides and of dashboard instruments.



The backrest side bolsters should be positioned close enough to your upper torso to provide comfortable lateral support without restricting movement.



Adjust the tilt of the seat so you can easily press the pedals down to the floor. Your thighs should rest lightly on the seat cushion without pressing on it.



Check the angle of your headrest. The upper edge should be aligned with the top of your head. Adjust to allow about three quarters of an inch between your head and the headrest.



- ✓ Try to maintain good driving **posture**; this is easier to do if you take regular breaks
- ✓ If possible, on long journeys try to **share** the driving with another person. Being a passenger will allow you to move around more, alleviating the stress on your back
- ✓ Take care when getting **in and out** of your vehicle; do not twist your back but rather rotate your whole body
- ✓ Take care when **loading and unloading** items from your vehicle; carry smaller loads close to your body and remember to bend your knees when lifting
- ✓ If driving is part of your job **talk** to your **employer** or **HR** department about your back pain, they may be able to come up with ways to help you e.g. changes to your vehicle or fewer driving hours
- ✓ **Exercise** as it helps keep your back strong and healthy decreasing the risk of developing back pain!

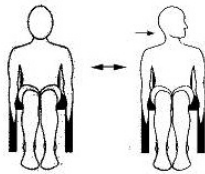
Useful exercises

Exercise is a great way to **prevent** and **manage** back pain. Here are some useful exercises you can try. If you have an existing back condition you may want to skip some exercises such as the forward bend and do only those that do not exacerbate your pain.

While driving (only when safe to do so)

Neck and shoulder stretches

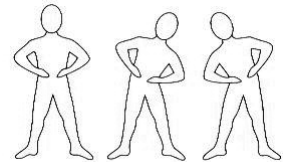
- Look to the left and hold for a count of three
- Return to central position
- Look to the right and hold for a count of three
- Repeat 10 times
- Try not to compress the neck
- You can do this while driving but **ONLY** when it is safe to do so e.g. when in heavy traffic!



When taking a break from driving

Side bends

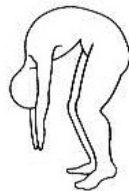
- Start with your feet hip width apart, hands on hips
- Bend slowly to the left and then slowly to the right
- Do not tilt forward
- Repeat 10 times.



Before or after a journey

Forward Bend

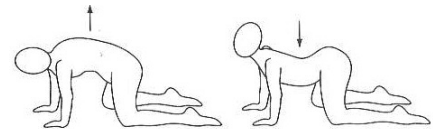
- Stand with your feet hip width apart and your knees bent
- Contract your stomach muscles and slowly roll down as far as you can - don't overstretch
- Allow your arms to fall towards your feet then gently straighten up to your starting position
- Repeat 10 times.



When at home

Cat's pose

- Arch your back (looking down)
- Lower your stomach towards the floor - hollow your back (looking up)
- If you're pregnant don't hollow your back - keep it straight
- Repeat 10 times.



For more information on caring for your back when driving and other useful exercises contact BackCare or visit www.backcare.org.uk