

Do You Experience Pain While Driving?

Work, vacation, carpooling – whatever the reason, people are spending more time in the car. This can be a pain in the back, literally! A number of studies have shown associations between driving and back pain. The strain of sitting in a fixed position combined with the motion, vibrations and swaying of the vehicle and the foot action on the pedals or clutch can cause considerable pain. However, there are simple actions that can help you alleviate or prevent back pain.

Before the Trip

One of the most important things you can do is to stretch before, during and after a long car trip to reduce strain. Stretch your neck and back, move your spine around, bend side to side – whatever it takes to relieve the pressure you are feeling.

Frequent breaks during a long car trip are important to avoid fatigue. If possible, take turns with another driver so that you can sit in a more relaxed position when not driving.



Support Your Back

Be sure you have good lumbar back support from the car seat—or simply use a pillow or rolled up towel to provide the support you need to your lower back. Ideally, your car seat should have adjustable seat incline, height, lumbar support, neck support, arm rests and other features to help you change positions and be comfortable. In addition, features to minimize vibrations can help reduce body fatigue.

Avoid Smoking

If you are a smoker, here is one more reason not to smoke. Studies have shown smoking reduces the amount of blood flow to the spine and makes your skeletal system more prone to injury and means you will require more time to heal. Smoking is related to the acceleration of degenerative disc syndrome. If you are a smoker, talk to your physician about how you can quit smoking.

Watch Your Seat

Do you sit on your wallet when driving? Avoid sitting on anything that can misalign your spine. Also, it is recommended that you sit with your knees slightly higher than your hips. Sit close enough to the wheel to avoid reaching; this will lessen stress. (Avoid sitting too close to the steering wheel, especially if you are short, as you can become injured from the air bag.)

Good Posture

Sitting up straight (like your mother told you) and changing positions throughout the drive can help. Cloth seats provide more friction than leather or vinyl and can help maintain posture. (You can use a towel or pad over a leather or vinyl seat to provide additional friction.) Automatic vehicles may cause less stress than a manual transmission, which requires you to reach out your leg when pressing in the clutch.

If you have back pain from driving and these measures do not alleviate your pain, see your physician.

For additional advice or consultation on spinal problems, you may request a referral from your primary care physician to the Indiana Spine Group. For more information, visit www.indianaspinegroup.com or call 317.228.7000.

This information is provided by Indiana Spine Group.

