

XXXI. How to Sit Pain-Free in your Vehicle with Back Pain/Sciatica

We hope to convey to you that in order to reduce back pain while sitting, you must increase your movement and position changes. The most important tactic you can use to combat back pain while sitting is to intermix sitting with walking and movement. Even the person who attempts to sit with the perfect posture should still intermix back position changes, movement, and walking.

Foam Back Supports

We believe it is important to use back supports to help avoid the “C” position and to obtain a good sitting posture when in the car. Driving in a vehicle is generally very hard on your back. This is especially true if you are driving with a slumped posture. Vibration and road shock will place even further stress on your back.



In this picture one can see a foam roll is being used to keep the spine from slumping into the “C” position.



Proper placement of a foam support

1. The foam roll should be placed approximately at the level of your belt (either a little higher or lower depending on what's comfortable).
2. Your bottom should be slid all the way back in the seat.
3. Lean back against the roll and attempt to keep your body in straight alignment.

Your body type and specific back problem will dictate the size of back support you need. A larger person with greater curves is more likely to require a thicker back support. If the roll feels like it is too much, you may want to try a thinner support. Before you purchase a foam back support, we recommend you try the following: Take a towel and roll it into a tube shape. Place it behind your back when sitting and gauge your comfort level.

We have also generally found our patients who are suffering from back pain want a thicker support (or a thicker towel). Those who are not currently having back pain generally desire a thinner roll. Experiment and decide what works for you.

If you decide to use the rolled towel for a longer trial period, you may want to duct tape the ends to prevent it from unraveling. Once you have decided on a thickness, you have the option of purchasing a back support with a similar feel.

We also recommend using a support to help prevent back pain from occurring or reoccurring.

It is important to follow these rules when driving or after driving:

1. Avoid long trips when recovering from sciatica or a back injury.
2. If you need to drive, stop every half hour and walk a bit. Perform standing back extensions if allowed by your therapist.
3. Do not slump. Use a back support or rolled towel as already suggested.



4. Use your left foot to prevent your bottom from sliding forward on your seat (which can cause your back to slump). Use the stationary inclined footrest located to the left side of the brake pedal if this feature is available in your car.

5. Try moving your car seat slightly forward. When your knees are too straight, the tendency will be for your bottom to slip forward on the seat and cause you to slump.



Slumped with knees straight



Correct Posture



6. Lower your hands on the steering wheel. The least stressful and fatiguing position for the arms, neck, and back when driving is with your arms hanging nearly vertical. This is accomplished by placing your hands on the steering wheel in the nine o'clock - three o'clock position or the eight o'clock - four o'clock position.



Placing your hands on the steering wheel in the ten o'clock - two o'clock position will cause your upper back and shoulders to round forward.

7. Excessive back inclination will also cause your back to slump forward.

8. Avoid reaching to the back seat. This will cause your back to bend and twist.



9. Use the proper technique for getting into and out of your car. When getting out of the car, pivot your whole body as a unit on the seat while you bring one leg out of the car at a time. For support, grasp the doorframe or steering wheel.

When both legs are out of the car, scoot forward on the seat. Move your feet back and under you as far as possible. Then, lean forward from your hips, keeping your back straight. Finally stand with assistance from the doorframe or steering wheel.

10. Do not lift any heavy objects immediately after a long car ride. A long drive leads to fatigue of your lower back muscles, increased pressure on your discs, and stretching of your back ligaments. You are at a higher risk for developing low back pain and sciatica when involving yourself with lifting activities after long car rides.



Remember, your goal is to keep your back in proper alignment. By keeping your back in proper alignment, you are STOPPING THE CAUSE OF YOUR BACK PAIN.