

Ten Tips to Improve Your Ergonomics While Driving

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The goal of ergonomics is to fit your car so you can drive in a way that maximizes the natural ability of your body to move and respond to physical stress. This minimizes exposures to risk factors that may result in injury or illness.

Here are 10 easy things to look for **before** you start your next drive:

1. **Remove items from your pockets**, such as a wallet or keys, which may press on soft tissue as you sit down. This compression can reduce circulation or press on nerves and other soft tissues.
2. **Position items that you may need during your drive**: sunglasses, tissue, if you have allergies like the rest of us, throat lozenges or mints, etc. Place these in a location so you do not have to reach for them while driving. If you have to reach for an item, take the time to pull over in a safe place instead of risking an accident and/or injury due to awkward reaching.
3. **Buckle up!** If the seat belt strap is uncomfortable, take a short piece of large diameter soft pipe insulation or foam and place it on the part of the strap that is not comfortable against your body. If you like to spend money, purchase a shoulder strap cushion at your favorite store where car accessories are sold.
4. **Adjust your mirrors** so that you don't have to crane your neck to see. If you have a blind spot in your car you can attach a small mirror your dashboard to improve your view.
5. **Lumbar support** – the lower part of your back should feel supported. If it is not supported by your car seat you can roll up a small towel and place it in the curve of your lower back. A lumbar roll is a cylindrical shaped pillow sold at back stores and physical therapy offices. This is more expensive but some people like the support of foam and they also like to spend money.
6. **Back tilt** – The least amount of pressure on the back occurs when your seat back is at 100-110 degrees so that you are slightly reclined. The seat back should fully support your back. If you cannot recline your seat back, take frequent breaks from your upright posture by shifting your weight side to side and using small upper body motions to relax the back (see the Wellness Center staff for more ideas on exercises and stretches while driving).

7. **Seat cushion length** – when seated in your car, scoot your tail bone as far back to the seat back as possible. After doing this, you should be able to place your hand comfortably between the back of your knee and the front of the seat. If you cannot do this, add a pillow or back cushion to your car seat to move you forward.



8. **Seat pan tilt** – the seat of your car should allow for your knees to be slightly lower than your hips. This opens up your hip flexors and increases circulation to the back and decreases pressure on the lower back.



9. **Stepping up and stepping out** – If you drive one of those large vehicles with a high step up/down add an extra step or slowly step in and out of your vehicle versus jumping down. Over time, the jumping down can cause compression to your spine. Straps and other hand assist devices for holding on to should be checked frequently for wear and tear.
10. **Steering wheel grip** – “the best posture is the next posture.” It is advisable to keep two hands on your steering wheel except when shifting gears. Change your hand postures frequently to improve circulation and reduce fatigue. If you find you get stressed while driving, contact EAP at 7-7339 for information on how to reduce stress in your life using “biofeedback.” There are common postures that should be avoided:
- **The death grip** – this grip results in decreased circulation and muscle tension. Your grip should be light. If your knuckles are white, you are gripping too hard!
 - **The one arm cool dude** – You know the one: the wrist rests at 12 o’clock on the steering wheel and the fingers flop over the top. Not only does this cause compression of soft tissue of the wrist, but it reduces circulation at the neck and shoulder, too.
 - **Arms straight out** in front to reach the steering wheel – you should be able to drive with your shoulders relaxed and your arms close to the sides of your body. If you have to reach too far forward your steering wheel may be too far away. You can try tilting the steering wheel upwards and using a light grasp lower on the steering wheel.
 - **One arm propped** on your window – this posture decreases circulation at the neck and shoulder and may compress soft tissue on the arm/wrist.