

Driving—MSDs

A truck driver on a long trip across Canada started feeling discomfort in his lower back. He continued driving and made as few stops as possible in order to reach his destination quickly. His discomfort became worse but he tried to ignore it—the pain had always gone away in the past.

Once he reached his destination, he had trouble walking and was not able to get a restful sleep because of his back pain. The driver ended up missing a month of work and needed therapy to treat his back pain.

Explain dangers

Even when you're sitting still in a moving vehicle, your body is subjected to external forces that can increase your risk of developing lower back pain.

These forces include:

- The accelerations and decelerations of the vehicle
- The swaying of the vehicle from side to side
- The vibration from the engine and rough road conditions.

Because your hands and feet are actively involved in the driving task, they are not able to support and stabilize your lower body to offset these external forces.

In order to stabilize the upper body, the lower back muscles have to be constantly active. As a result, these muscles become fatigued leading to muscle pain in the lower back.

Identify controls

- Adjust the seat for a comfortable sitting position that gives you full access to the vehicle controls. Sitting close to the steering wheel prevents you from slouching. Sitting too far away may cause you to strain to reach the pedals.
- Adjust the mirrors so that you have good visibility while maintaining a neutral neck position.

- Adjust the steering wheel for a comfortable arm position. Positioning your hands at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock and supporting your elbows on the armrest is recommended.
- If the seat has an air suspension system, adjust it so that the seat is comfortable and provides support.
- Try to get out of your vehicle every hour or two to stand, stretch, and move around for a few minutes. Changing your posture will help reduce stiffness and fatigue.
- Don't do any heavy lifting immediately after a long period of driving. Take a few minutes to walk around until your back regains its structural integrity.
- Try not to drive with your wallet in your back pocket. This can put extra pressure on your sciatic nerve and cause your spine to become misaligned.
- Maintain a good sitting posture by putting a roll or cushion between your lower back and the seat to keep the natural curve in your lower back.
- Don't sit in one position for a long time. Change your position by arching your back to reduce muscle tension or adjusting the lumbar support on your seat.
- Use the cruise control function in your car if you have it and it's safe to do so. It allows you adjust the position of your feet and gives them a break from the driving task.
- Use heated seats if you have them, even in the warm months. Heat will help relax tight joints and muscles and ease back pain.

Demonstrate

Ask your workers to describe any back problems they have had while driving.

Show workers a comfortable sitting position while driving. With feet on the pedals, recline the seat to a 100 to 110 degree angle (shoulders will be slightly behind the hips) and move the seat backward or forwards until the knees are the same height as the hips.