

## CAR COMFORT

We all know the dangers of operating a motor vehicle. Warnings are everywhere and car crashes with explosions as exclamation points are in every movie and T.V. show. It may surprise you then when I tell you that most of the injuries I see from cars and trucks are from repetitive stress not accidents.

We spend a good deal of our week in a car seat. Living in a little city leads to plenty of commuting to shop or work in the big metropolis. Sitting puts three times the pressure on a lumbar disc that standing does. If we sit in poor posture this is even greater. Combine with that any bumps or potholes you hit in the road and you have some severe compressive forces on your low back. We would probably move out of this position if we could but, the vehicle limits out motion. Another factor is the vibration from the car that numbs our spines. All of us who have spent time in an electric massage chair know that vibration makes us feel a little better. This is because the motion sensation is carried on the same pathway as pain in the spinal cord and blocks some of the pain. So, you might feel fine on the drive but once you stop to get out you realize that your back is very sore. You might have moved to a better position due to discomfort, but the vibration shut off some of those pain signals.

Besides the low back dilemma is the upper back and neck. Though they do not take the amount of compressive forces through the discs as the lumbar spine they can have serious trouble with prolonged driving in poor positions. Seats that are too small or improperly adjusted may cause the head to sit forward of the shoulders enough to accelerate degenerative arthritic changes. Also, as we reach ahead to grip the wheel our shoulders and upper back tend to round forward. They tend to stay forward if we drive long enough and never do exercises to move them back.

The last problem that is common with cars and trucks is the getting into and out of them. Most of us do a strange contortionist act to get in and out that involves bending, twisting and ducking while pointing our feet in different directions. This does not even take into account the injuries that happen when we reach into the backseat to get a child, the trunk to get a suitcase or reaching over the seat to get a purse or briefcase.

It is not like we can avoid the driving, so precautions must be taken. Always use a good lumbar support. If your car does not have one buy one; it's cheap insurance. The closer you can keep your spine to the same posture it has when standing the better off you are. Do not tilt yourself back so far that you are driving from the backseat. If you do this you have to reach forward quite a ways to get to the wheel and your shoulders and upper back will round, your low back will be off the lumbar support and your neck will be miles away from the headrest. The headrest should be positioned so that it is above the top of the ear and within five inches of your head when driving. If you have the option in your vehicle set the wheel at a comfortable distance and tilt so that there is no extreme reaching. Also, adjust the seat so that it does not cause any loss of circulation with pressure to the back of the legs.

All of this keeps us safer when driving, but what about once the car stops? If you have a damaged low back be sure to use proper lifting technique to get anything in the back seat or trunk. No reaching over the front seat into the back. Drag any objects as close to you as possible while still in the car and then lift with your legs while holding objects close to your body. Getting into and out of car with a bad back takes time and patience. Open the door, turn your body while still sitting so that you are faced out of the car, place both feet on the ground, scoot yourself to edge of the seat, hold onto the side of the car and the door and stand using your arms to help and your legs to do the bulk of the work. To get back in just do this procedure in reverse.

If you follow all of these driving tips and your commute still leaves you sore, it's time to see a chiropractor, medical doctor or physical therapist to get fixed up.