



# CIRSA LOSS ALERT

Published by the CIRSA Loss Control Department

Providing Risk Management Solutions

## Why Your Driving Posture Matters

An achy back, stiff neck, sore shoulders: the everyday shakes, rattles, and rolls of daily commuting can take a toll on your body.

The vehicles we drive are part of the problem. Some car seats don't adequately accommodate the curve of the lower back, putting additional strain on the spine. Compact cars may lack legroom and head space, forcing some drivers to contort their bodies into unhealthy positions just to operate the vehicle.

But it's not always the vehicle's fault, says Dr. Ginger Edgcombe Dorsey, Ph.D., Ergonomics Program Manager for the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Sometimes the problem is simply how we sit. In her ongoing research of USDA employees, she finds that poor driving posture can lead to an increased risk of discomfort in the neck, back, shoulders, arms, wrists, fingers, legs, and

feet. Over time, she says, bad posture could result in chronic pain, making you vulnerable to more injuries.

And sore limbs may be the least of it: [One study found that poorly positioned drivers also have an increased risk of serious injury if they get into an accident.](#)



Fortunately, you can alleviate many posture-related discomforts with proper adjustment of the driver's seat and mirrors. Here's what Dorsey recommends:

### 1. Support Your Back

Slide your tailbone as close to the seat back as possible. Aim for a two to three-finger gap between the back of your knees and the front of your seat. If your vehicle doesn't allow for the proper position, a lumbar or back cushion may help.

### 2. Lift Your Hips

If you can, adjust your "seat pan" (the part you sit on) so that your thighs are supported along their entire length and your knees are slightly lower than your hips. This will increase circulation to your back while opening your hips.

*(continued on back)*

## Driving Posture (cont.)

### **3. Don't Sit Too Close**

You should be able to comfortably reach the pedals and press them through their full range with your entire foot. Safety is also a consideration here; [this study](#) suggests that drivers whose chests were closer to the wheel were significantly more likely to suffer severe injuries to the head, neck, and chest in front and rear-end collisions.

### **4. Get the Right Height**

Make sure your seat raises your eye level at least three inches above the steering wheel while allowing enough clearance between your head and the roof.

### **5. Lean Back a Little**

The angle of your seat back should be a little greater than a perpendicular 90 degrees. At 100 to 110 degrees, the seat will put the least pressure on your back. Leaning too far back forces you to push your head and neck forward, which can cause neck and shoulder pain and tingling in the fingers.

### **6. Set Your Headrest**

Set the top of the headrest between the top of your ears and the top of your head. It should just touch the back of your head when you're sitting comfortably. The headrest is also important in reducing whiplash injuries in the event of a rear-end collision — so important, in fact, that [NHTSA](#) has developed headrest standards in order to reduce whiplash injuries.

### **7. Use Lumbar Support**

If your car has adjustable lumbar support, set it using both the front-back and up-down controls so you feel an even pressure from your hips to your shoulders. If your car doesn't have automatic support, a lumbar pillow or even a rolled-up towel can help.

### **8. Adjust Your Mirrors**

Prevent neck strain by making sure your rear-view and side mirrors are properly adjusted. You should be able to see the traffic behind you without having to crane your neck.

### **9. Take Breaks**

Even when you're perfectly situated in the driver's seat, fatigue will inevitably set in, especially when you're driving for long periods. Listen to your body. And take periodic breaks. Park safely at a rest stop or other designated stopping area to get out of the car and stretch.