

This fact sheet is designed to inform and advise drivers on how to reduce and avoid the incidence of back problems by observing a few simple rules. Although many back problems take years to develop, once the back is damaged it can become a persistent, recurring problem. Research has shown that driver discomfort and aggravation of existing back problems can be caused by driving for long periods.

**Causes:** Most back problems experienced by high mileage drivers arise from fixed postures maintained over long periods and exposure to vehicle vibration and poor seat design. Space in the drivers compartment and the position and effort required to operate vehicle controls, e.g. pedals, steering wheel and gearshift can also contribute.

### **‘Back Friendly’ Vehicles**

When choosing a vehicle drivers should consider not only the functional requirements but also how the vehicle can be adjusted in both the seat and steering wheel.

The seat should provide support beneath you posterior and in the small of the back.

The lower back support should be adjustable in size (in and out) and height The size adjustment will accommodate the different

depths of lumbar curve among individuals, and height will ensure that the support is provided at the correct level.

To determine whether the seats offer enough lumbar support test drive the vehicle for at least one hour.

Don’t be blinded’ by the seats initial comfort feeling.

There are many seating aids available that can be fitted to a vehicle seat if the seat support and adjustment is not sufficient.

The safety head restraint should not be too large and should also be adjustable to fit just a short distance behind the head.

Check the pedals are not offset from the centre line of the seat.

Power-assisted steering is advisable as this places less strain on the back when turning the steering wheel, particularly at slow speeds.

Automatic gearbox can also reduce back discomfort, as the driver is less constrained without the need to continually depress the clutch, and reach to engage the gears.

Try to select a vehicle with a low boot sill

### **Lifting Into And Out Of Your Vehicle**

A high boot sill and close proximity of the boot lid and rear bumper can also make putting

putting things into and taking things out of the boot difficult. This type of space limitation can cause awkward back and postures that can make the back susceptible to injury. Particular care should be taken after you have been driving for long periods. If frequent handling of loads into and out of a vehicle is part of your job a few simple rules can be followed to ensure minimum discomfort and aggravation to the back:

Organisation of items in the boot to reduce the amount of handling.

Ensure all items are stable and secure in the boot prior to driving, so that the loads do not slide to the front of the boot, causing reach and stretch problems later.

Consider storing items on the front or back seats. Access is usually easier as the handler can get closer to the loads. Never twist around from the front seat to remove an item in the back Get out and remove it from a standing position.

Park as close to the drop off point as possible.

Park so that the doors can be opened fully and the loads can be handled with good posture.

When leaving your vehicle move slowly and avoid twisting and straining your back.

## Driving Breaks

Driving can be stressful, particularly if it is job related. Drivers should stop after long periods to give the lower back attention. The spine needs to be 'opened out' and a brisk walk for one or two minutes will circulate fresh blood into the static muscles of the back and shoulders. This can help prevent a painful back.

Never drive for long periods without a break.

When planning a long journey allow a little extra time for short breaks

Make stops when you become tired and are aware of discomfort.

Don't remain in your drivers seat during breaks.

Exercise your back at every opportunity whilst sitting at the wheel. Pull in your stomach muscles and breathe out, relax and repeat. Release muscle tension by raising your shoulders up to your ears, then push them back against the seat and relax.

Before lifting, stand up, place hands in small of back and arch backwards a few times. This will 'reset' the back after driving.

## Useful Tips for HGV Drivers

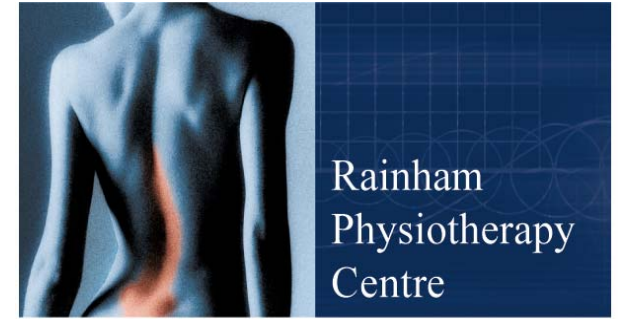
Always use the footstep to climb down from the cabin and never jump to the ground, particularly after the back has been in a fixed sitting posture for a long period. The impact could cause back injuries.

Beware when opening doors, lifting roller shutters, releasing levers on canvas curtains etc, particularly if these devices require alot of effort to move. The stiffness and height of these levers (shoulder level or above) will cause the driver to use the back muscles more, as the arm muscles are less effective in pulling and pushing efforts in this position. The back will be especially vulnerable if the driver has just spent a long period driving.

If the levers are below normal working height (between hip and chest) it is important to bend your knees, not your back.

Always make use of the tail-lift and other mechanical lifting equipment, if available, to move loads onto and off the vehicle.

**We are all unique. What is comfortable for one individual will not necessarily suit another. If your present vehicle does not provide a satisfactory level of comfort, there are products available that can help ease back strain whilst driving.**



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**BETTER  
BACKS  
FOR  
DRIVERS**