



A series of bulletins intended to keep members informed and safe

Number 10
November 19, 2009

Subject: Injuries and pain from prolonged driving

People who drive for a living or spend long periods of time sitting in a vehicle are at increased risk for injury. Spending a lot of time sitting in a vehicle without getting out to stretch every hour or two can lead to aches, pains and stiffness.

Common injuries and health effects associated with prolonged driving include:

- Cramps or spasms in the feet, legs or lower back
- Pain or discomfort at pressure points on the back, legs and buttocks
- Poor circulation in the legs and feet
- Increased chance of low back injury from lifting immediately after driving
- Increased risk for degeneration of spinal discs and disc damage (herniation)

Most injuries from driving can be attributed to two things: sitting for long periods of time and whole-body vibration.

Sitting flattens out the small of your back, increasing the pressure on spinal discs. When sitting, your discs may not be able to handle vehicle vibrations. Also, ligaments in the back that help to hold the spine together can stretch and slacken when sitting for long periods. They can stay that way for a while, even after you stand. This stress on discs and ligaments can increase your risk for back injury.

Whole-body vibration triggers bursts of back muscle activity. This causes neck and back muscles to tire more quickly, reducing the spinal support these muscles provide. Even if the muscles aren't working hard, without rest they become fatigued, increasing the risk of back injury.

Tips to help avoid the potential health hazards of driving

- Adjust your seat and steering wheel to ensure you:
 - can reach the steering wheel without stretching your arms. Leave 25 – 30 cm (10 - 12 in.) between the steering wheel and your chest for the air bag to deploy,
 - can press the pedals without moving your lower back forward off the seat back,
 - can comfortably reach the controls,
 - sit high enough to see out front and side windows and have a good view of the instruments, gauges, and mirrors.
- Tilt the seat cushion until your thighs are supported along the full length of the cushion without pressure at the back of your knees.
- Tilt the seat a notch or two back and forth every 20-30 minutes to change the direction of vibration on your body, if this can be done safely.
- Keep suspension in good working order. Add padding over your seat to absorb vibration.
- Use lumbar support to fit the back rest to your back. A rolled up towel will work fine.
- Use good posture – try not to slouch.
- Stop and take regular rest/stretch breaks for several minutes every hour or two.

Visit the TWU Health & Safety webpage at: www.twu-stt.ca/en/health-and-safety

TWU National Health & Safety Committee