

5 Tips for Pain-Free, Relaxed Driving

June 2nd, 2010 Categories: [Healthy Posture](#)

With summer almost upon us, you probably have plans to take a vacation at some point (hopefully!). Maybe you've found a nice spot to spend a few days, and you'd like to drive there rather than fly. But driving can be a "can of worms" for some people. You might be pretty uncomfortable on long car trips, or even have to stop every hour to do stretches in order to relieve back pain.

You can learn to drive in comfort by following some simple guidelines for alignment (the Balance posture method). This has made a huge difference for me. I used to be miserable on those long car trips. I was usually uncomfortable, achy and exhausted.

When I began sitting in Balance using these guidelines, it made a **huge difference in my comfort level**. I now can easily drive the 8-9 hours up to Oregon in one day, only needing to stop once for lunch most times. I practice aligning myself when I start out, and periodically throughout the drive. What shocked me was **how much easier it was for me to stay alert** when my spine and neck were aligned in a healthier way.

Try these tips on your next long (or short) road trip. I hope they help you have a much better vacation!

The 5 Tips

1. Sit on your sitz bones

This is the most important point. If you sit with your pelvis tucked forward on the seat, your low back will be rounded, and your upper back, neck & head will have to round forward as a counterbalance. So to align your pelvis in Balance, pull your feet as far back as you can towards the car seat. Lean forward from your hip crease and lift your pelvis up off the seat and scoot it as far back in the seat as possible. At this point you may not be able to reach the pedals anymore! If so, just slide the seat forward (not your pelvis!).

2. Don't overuse lumbar supports

Most people want to use lumbar supports because their backs are collapsed. However, if you sit on your sitz bones as described above, you probably won't need any additional lumbar support, unless your car seat is very old and saggy. If you can adjust the support in the seat, dial it down to the minimum amount. Too much curving of the lumbar spine causes compression.

3. Relax your back

Rather than lifting your chest, which tightens your back, let your front ribs drop down towards your pelvis. As you drop down in front, you will lengthen your back. Don't push your shoulders or head back against the seat or headrest. Drop down straight through your core, rather than rounding way forward toward the steering wheel.

4. Align your shoulders

Periodically you can do a shoulder roll with each shoulder, rolling it up, back and down. Then draw your shoulder blade down your back and slightly in towards the center of your back. Once you've done this, just relax your shoulders. Don't try to "hold" them in this position, because that just leads to tension. It's better to realign them whenever you feel achy or tired.

5. Align your neck & head

After doing shoulder rolls, you can give your neck a gentle stretch by drawing your chin in towards your throat so that you feel a stretch in the back of your neck. Imagine the crown of your head being lifted up. Then release and let your face be vertical. Most people have their heads too far forward, with the chin much too high. This causes compression in the neck, including in the arteries that bring blood to your brain (makes you sleepy!). By realigning your neck and head, and keeping your chin slightly down, you'll feel more comfortable and more alert. Again, once you've done the stretch, let your neck relax rather than "holding" a position with tension.

If you'd like me to help you get more comfortable in your car seat, I'd be happy to schedule an appointment with you. You can call (707) 658-2599 to set one up. You also might consider taking the Balance Your Body program to learn healthy alignment in your car, at home and at work. Check out my website, www.sonomabodybalance.com for details.

Happy Trails!

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