



Osteoporosis Canada

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COPING

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COPN: Proudly Celebrating our 10th Anniversary **Safer Driving with Osteoporosis**

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Fracture

TIP:

Putting on a seat belt usually requires some rotation to get hold of the strap. To prevent too much twisting of the spine, especially if you have osteoporosis in the spine or a spine fracture, try to keep your head high and your spine tall as you turn your whole body, as one unit, from the hips.

This article first appeared in our September 30, 2011 COPING Newsletter

Osteoporosis can impact many activities of everyday life and none more so than driving a vehicle. If you or someone you love suffers from (or is at risk for) vertebral fractures, kyphosis (an exaggerated forward curvature of the upper back) or limited movement in their neck or spine, they may require modifications to their posture or their vehicle to make their driving safer and more comfortable.

There are several ways that our physical health can affect our driving. Physical changes associated with aging, osteoporosis and other medical conditions can make it difficult to get into and out of a vehicle or to drive comfortably for long periods of time. Changes in flexibility can make it difficult to shoulder check, watch for pedestrians, park and merge with oncoming traffic. Muscular strength is important for the safe control of the steering wheel as well as the gas and brake pedals.

Good positioning in the driver's seat is also important for comfortable, safe driving. The key to good body mechanics and posture is the proper alignment of the head, shoulders, spine, hips, knees and ankles. A balanced and supportive relationship between all these body parts puts less stress and pressure on the spine. Proper posture can also help to limit the amount of kyphosis, or forward curvature of the upper back, that can result from broken bones in the spine or from weak back muscles or both.

To maintain proper postural alignment while driving, try keeping your shoulders back so as to avoid having a slumped, head-forward posture, try to avoid bending forward from the waist, and try to avoid twisting of the spine. If these changes in posture are difficult to do, it may be because your seat needs to be adjusted. You might need a wedge cushion or back support to raise you up higher, and/or a lumbar supporting pillow behind your low back to make you more comfortable while improving your posture.

What's the optimal way to sit while driving? That question was answered by a study published in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*. After an exhaustive review of scientific journals and automotive engineering reports, here are the authors' recommendations:

- The seat back should be almost straight up, at a 100-degree angle from the floor.
- The knees should be only slightly higher than the buttocks. If they are not, the back of your seat needs to be raised with a wedge cushion unless your seat adjusts upwards electronically.
- The head should tilt back very slightly (only 10 degrees).
- Preferably, the elbows should rest on the armrests while gripping the wheel with hands in the 9 and 3 o'clock positions (instead of at 10 and 2 o'clock) to avoid injuring the hands if the airbag deploys.

More significant adaptations may require the expert advice of an occupational therapist/ergonomist for equipment like seat lifts, adjustable seats and/or leg lifters.

Additional Tips:

- Make sure your back is aligned against the seat in an upright position and the headrest is supporting the middle of the back of your head and not your neck.
- Use a lumbar support pillow (or a rolled up towel) to make your seat more comfortable and to support your lower back.
- Adjust the seat and steering wheel to a comfortable position to avoid reaching, and to improve visibility.
- Consider using cruise control for long drives - resting both feet on the floor provides more support for your lower back.
- Get out of the car and stretch every 20-30 minutes, if possible.
- If back pain flares up while you're driving and you cannot stop and rest, apply a cold pack to the affected area. Wrap a small bag of ice in a towel and place it between your lower back and the seatback. Or if it feels better, alternate ice and heat from a disposable, portable heat pack every 15-20 minutes.
- If you are purchasing a new vehicle, consider one with an electronically adjustable driver's seat and heated seats.

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FUNNY BONE:

Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.

A Recipe from our Sponsor

Tomato, ravioli and Havarti soup

Course: *Soups & Creams*

Preparation Time: *15 mins*

Cooking Time: *15 mins*

Yields: *6 servings*

1/2 milk product serving(s) per person

Calcium: 28% DV/312 mg



Ingredients

1 tbsp (15 mL) **butter**
1 onion, minced
2 cans (796 mL) diced tomatoes, no salt added
2 tbsp (30 mL) tomato paste, no salt added
1 (340 g) package meat ravioli
1/2 cup (125 mL) **milk**
3 tbsp (45 mL) sun-dried tomato or basil pesto
Salt
Freshly ground pepper
4 oz (120 g) **Canadian Havarti**, finely diced

Preparation

In a saucepan, melt butter and brown onion 2–3 minutes. Add tomatoes and tomato paste. Let simmer 10 minutes, covered.

Meanwhile, cook ravioli according to instructions on packaging. Drain and reserve.

Purée the tomato mixture while adding milk and pesto. Season with salt and pepper and reheat.

Divide tomato soup among bowls, add ravioli and garnish with Havarti.

For more information about this recipe:

<http://www.dairygoodness.ca/getenough/recipes/tomato-ravioli-and-havarti-soup>

This issue of COPING is sponsored by Dairy Farmers of Canada

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