

Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!

Safe Driving with Osteoporosis

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Fracture Fact:

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.

Some specific adaptive devices may be helpful to compensate for physical changes, reduce twisting and make the vehicle fit the person more comfortably and safely. These include:

- Rear and side view mirror extensions, commercially available at automotive stores
- Extended door straps or car handles at outlets specializing in medical equipment
- Easy-reach seat belts - available from the car dealer for the make of your vehicle
- A wedge cushion available from automotive stores
- Molded seats with back support available from most Home Healthcare Centres.

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.

Upcoming Virtual Education Forum

Osteoporosis Medications: Benefits and Risks in 2013

- **Wednesday, October 16, 2013**
- **1:30 to 3:00pm EDT**
- **Speaker:** Dr. Sandra Kim, MD, MSc, FRCPC, Women's College Hospital

Men and Osteoporosis: So you think it can't happen to you?

- **Friday, November 8, 2013**
- **1:30 to 3:00pm EST**
- **Speaker:** Jonathan D. Adachi MD, FRCPC, St. Joseph's Healthcare - McMaster University

[Click here](#) for registration information.

A Recipe from our Sponsor

Classic Broccoli Cheddar Soup

Broccoli has been an all-time favourite vegetable in Milk Calendar recipes over the past 35 years. This easy, irresistible soup that was first featured in 2000 makes broccoli shine again – especially when topped with Canadian Cheddar or Gruyère cheese.

- Course: Soups & Creams
- Preparation Time: 10 mins
- Cooking Time: 15-20 mins
- Yields: 4 to 6 servings

1 milk product serving(s) per person

Preparation

- 1 bunch broccoli (1-1/2 lbs/750 g)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 small baking potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 cups (500 ml) reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 tsp (2 ml) grated orange rind
- 1/2 tsp (2 ml) dried thyme
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) pepper
- Pinch hot pepper flakes
- 2 cups (500 ml) **milk**, (approx.)
- 1/2 tsp (2 ml) salt, (approx.)
- 1 cup (250 ml) shredded **Canadian Cheddar** or **Gruyère cheese**



Instructions

Peel and chop broccoli stems and coarsely chop florets, keeping stems and florets separate (you should have about 6 cups/1.5 L total).

In a pot, combine broccoli stems, onion, potatoes, garlic, broth, orange rind, thyme, pepper and hot pepper flakes; bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 10 min. Add florets; simmer, covered, for 5 min or until vegetables are softened.

Transfer to a blender or food processor, in batches, or use an immersion blender in the pot and purée soup, adding milk, until smooth. Return to pot, if necessary. Heat over medium heat, stirring, until steaming, but do not let boil. Stir in more milk if soup is too thick. Season with up to 1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt. Ladle into bowls; sprinkle with cheese.

Tips

To dress this soup up for entertaining, sprinkle the cheese on thin slices of baguette and toast under the broiler for elegant croutons, then float them in the bowls of soup.

Reduce broccoli to 4 cups (1 L) and add 2 cups (500 mL) chopped trimmed rapini with the florets. Add 1 tbs (15 mL) chopped fresh sage instead of the dried thyme.

For more information about this recipe:

<http://www.dairygoodness.ca/getenough/recipes/classic-broccoli-cheddar-soup>

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These newsletters are not intended to replace individualized medical advice. Readers are advised to discuss their specific circumstances with their healthcare provider.

This issue of COPING is sponsored by Dairy Farmers of Canada



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