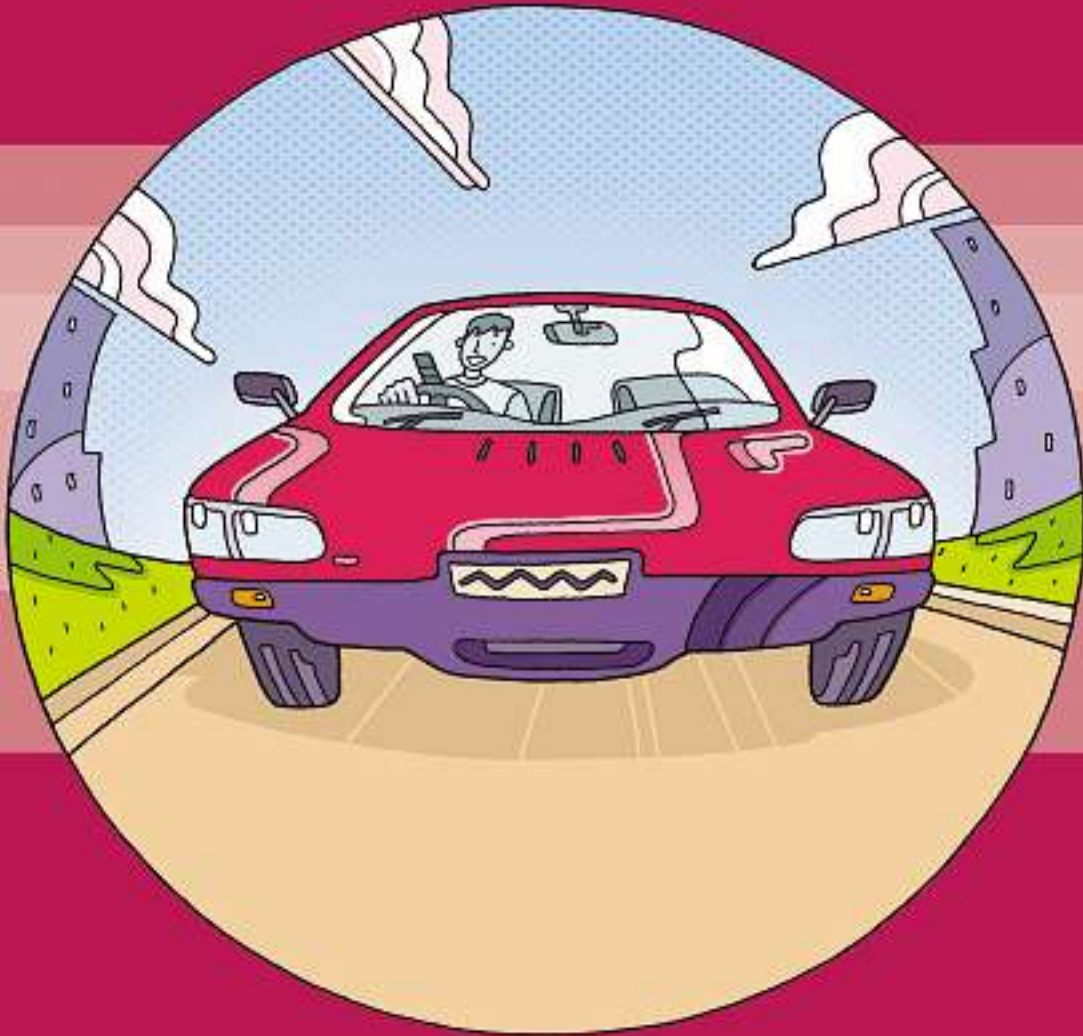




ricability



Motoring with arthritis



Motoring with arthritis

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This booklet

If driving or travelling in cars is becoming more difficult or less comfortable because of your arthritis, there are ways of doing things and adaptations that can make motoring easier again. This booklet outlines some of the key considerations when choosing or adapting a vehicle – see *Driving with arthritis* below for brief information on the condition.

We tell you about useful features on standard cars then the specialist products and techniques that might suit you. Product prices should be used as a guide only. If you can, shop around and talk to different firms as prices vary. At the back there are contact details for sources of expert advice.

Most of the products covered here are for driving and controlling a car.

For more information, see the Ricability guides below. All are free and for the cost of postage only or see them at www.ricability.org.uk. They all include lists of where to go for further information, help and advice.



■ The ins & outs of choosing a car

Overview of the features that can help, tips on getting in and out of a car, ways of adapting a car to suit you.

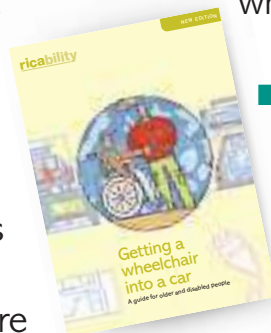
■ Car controls

In depth information on the types of adaptations and controls available and where to get them.



■ Getting a wheelchair into a car

Comprehensive information on hoists, racks and trailers and where to get them.



■ People lifters

Comprehensive information on devices that help wheelchair users to get in and out of a car and where to get them.



Driving with arthritis

There are different types of arthritis but some symptoms are common. They include pain, weakness and stiffness in joints, so can affect your getting in and out of a car and using its controls. You may also tire easily and have backache after sitting for a long time. The symptoms can vary from mild to severe but are unlikely to prevent you from driving.

However, you must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) whenever your ability to drive becomes impaired, and certainly when the condition is severe enough for you to need adaptations. For further information go to www.dvla.gov.uk or get *What you need to know about Driving Licences* (D100) from a Post Office. You must also tell your insurance company that you have arthritis.

When driving, wear any splints that you use to support painful joints: an Occupational Therapist may be able to adapt these if they make handling the car difficult. Your doctor will advise on when you can return to driving after joint replacement surgery.

Choosing a car

If you are buying a new car, the following pointers should help you identify useful features on standard vehicles. The less a car is modified, the higher its resale value.

When deciding on the type of car, think about your likely needs in future. Many features that are helpful to disabled motorists, like power steering, are now available on a wider range of models.

Getting in and out

- easy door handles that you just pull on, without buttons or levers
- tall and wide door openings – doors on two-door cars are usually wider
- doors with a wide opening angle
- no sills or low, narrow sills
- conveniently placed handholds
- seat height that best suits you
- electrically operated seats which go up and down, forwards and back
- space around the seat
- plenty of leg and foot room
- no door pockets that get in the way

Locking and ignition

- remote and central locking
- keyless entry system – a card to unlock and start the car
- remote start
- windows that close automatically when the car is locked

Primary controls

- automatic transmission. A must for most disabled drivers – generally easier to drive and cheaper to adapt
- power assisted steering – on some cars the effort needed can be lightened, by the dealership or by specialist converters
- cruise control to maintain a constant speed

Secondary controls

For things like the horn, lights and indicators – try to find a model where these are in the best position for you

- electric windows
- electric and heated door mirrors
- heated windscreen

- wipers which switch on automatically when it rains
- lights which switch on automatically when it gets dark
- easy controls for audio equipment
- parking distance sensor – sounds if you are near an obstacle
- reversing camera
- avoid or adapt ratchet type hand-brakes which can be stiff to release if you have weak hands and wrists

Boot or hatch

- tailgate with flat or fold down sill
- rear floor pulls out like a drawer
- rear seat which folds flat by power
- hatch which opens by power
- internal boot/hatch release
- adequate space if you have a wheelchair.

Plan of action

1 Ask some basic questions. Prepare to compromise as you may not find everything in one car. Think about what you may need in the future.

Will you drive the car? Or will you be a passenger? Whichever, think about getting in and out and your comfort. See *Products and techniques* below and our guide *The ins & outs of choosing a car*.

Will you need special controls? There is a big range – from simple gadgets to very complex controls. Again, see below and our *Car controls* guide.

What equipment will you carry? Think about every day and occasional needs.

Do you use a wheelchair? See below and our guides *Getting a wheelchair into a*

car and *People lifters*. If you travel in your wheelchair as a passenger or driver, a Mobility Centre can advise you about reliable converters and adaptations that can be fitted.

2 Collect information. Start with articles in motoring magazines and the internet plus manufacturers' brochures. If you are disabled other sources include:

Reviews by disabled drivers appear regularly in *Arthritis News* (free to members of Arthritis Care or £12 a year on subscription – see p10) and in the quarterly magazine *Lifestyle* from Motability (see below).

Mobility Centres and organisations of disabled motorists give independent advice and provide a range of services (see p11). Mobility Centres can assess if you can drive and find out what equipment may suit you. Assessments are free if you are referred by the DVLA and at a few centres with an NHS referral. Most charge £45 upwards. Adaptation firms can use the assessment report to help them find the most suitable equipment for you.

Mobility Roadshow (see p11) is a regular event with cars and adaptations; you can test drive vehicles there.

Motability (see p11) have a list of accredited car dealers with specialist knowledge and facilities for disabled people. A video on choosing a car, *Right first time*, is available from Motability (£3.99) or borrow it from an accredited dealer. Also see the

Motability website for an interactive *Vehicle Suitability Guide*.

3 Try out before buying any car you are considering. Dealers may bring one to you and should be able to find an automatic version. Try getting in and out several times. If you use a wheelchair, check that it fits. You might be able to try out adapted cars at a Mobility Centre or an adaptation firm. They will tell you whether the adaptations can be fitted to your car.

4 Try before taking it home. It is advisable to have lessons with an instructor using the adaptations you have chosen – essential when learning to use a left foot accelerator (see below). Mobility Centres can provide details. Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car.

5 Get plenty of practice. It may take time to feel confident. Consider lessons with a driving instructor who specialises in adapted vehicles – Mobility Centres can provide details.

Learning to drive

Mobility Centres and disabled drivers' organisations (see p10) can help you to find a driving instructor who specialises in teaching disabled drivers. They use cars with adapted controls or will teach you in your own vehicle.

Products and techniques

You may well be able to drive an unadapted car, particularly if it has automatic transmission and power steering. However if you start to feel discomfort, pain or stiffness, it is worth considering the adaptations available. See below and our *Car controls* guide, but this is also the time to get individual advice from a Mobility Centre (see p11).

If friends or family also drive your car, make sure your adaptations do not prevent them doing so or get in their way unreasonably.

Getting in and out

If your main car key is small but full of electronics, a chunky key holder on a spare key gives more leverage. They cost about £5 and are available from general aids suppliers.

Having the door hinges modified and the seat runners extended will give you more space to get in and out of the car. It may be possible to have an existing seat converted – to be higher, made height adjustable, swivel or be power assisted. Costs start at about £800 from adaptation firms. If swivelling helps, there are turning cushions (mostly between £20 and £80 from general aids suppliers) and replacement swivel seats, mostly from £700 upwards from adaptation firms.

There are some simple DIY solutions: loop a stiff length of webbing or a walking stick over your foot to pull it by hand over the door sill; and use a plastic bag to help you slide on to the seat and to swivel –

but remove it for the journey. To get in, sit first then turn and bring your legs in, doing the reverse to get out.

Many newer cars have adjustable seat belt fixings and there are seat belt devices – available from motor accessory shops – for reaching the belt, easing the tension or altering the anchorage point on the door pillar. For safety in any accident, the straps need to cross your shoulder and fit low across the pelvis, avoiding your stomach.

wheelchair users If you use a wheelchair, there is a range of devices and techniques for getting you and the wheelchair into your car or van. See:

Getting a wheelchair into a car for:

- hoists which lift a manual or powered chair into a vehicle
- rooftop hoists which winch a manual chair up and on to the roof of a car
- racks which carry a wheelchair on the back of a car
- trailers and ramps.

People lifters for:

- lifting seats which swing out and into the car, lowering and locking into a position to suit you
- wheelchair systems which are a specially designed wheelchair that slides into the car while you are sitting in it and becomes the car seat
- wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVS) which you travel in while in your wheelchair, including a list of specialist conversion companies.

Primary controls

Steering If gripping the wheel is painful, padding the rim with foam inside a wheel cover might help. It is worth having power assisted steering but the effort needed varies. On some cars it can be adjusted to suit you - contact an adaptation firm or a Mobility Centre for advice.

There is a range of different shaped steering balls or spinners so you can steer with one hand. They can help with tight turns, but you are likely to find it better to use both hands and

Tips

Here is advice from drivers with arthritis:

- Try out a car and any adaptations on one of your worst days, not when you're feeling well.
- Make sure the seat is comfortable and provides good support – adjust it and the steering wheel to suit you. Cushioning, electrically adjustable seats and heated seats all help.
- Get advice from an independent Mobility Centre.
- On trips take plenty of breaks to avoid getting stiff.
- Make sure any painkillers you use when driving do not cause drowsiness.

Easifuel

A small plastic gadget that holds open the trigger on petrol pumps – useful if you have limited dexterity or the use of only one hand (£2.99; call 020 7582 1117 to try before you buy).

so spread the effort. Holding the steering wheel at the '20 to 4' position will probably be more comfortable than '10 to 2' or 'quarter to 3'.

Changing gears This is likely to be easier with automatic transmission. To stop the car rolling back on slopes, you will need to use a handbrake or have an adaptation such as brake assist. There is a range of simple devices to help you to depress the safety button on some automatic gear selectors. If you cannot use a



Push button gear selector

mechanical gear selector, there are systems which electrically set the gear for you, but these can be costly. It might not be worth adding them to an older vehicle. A Mobility Centre will advise you.

Some cars have manual gears designed to be easy to use – such as nudging the gear stick – without having to use the clutch.

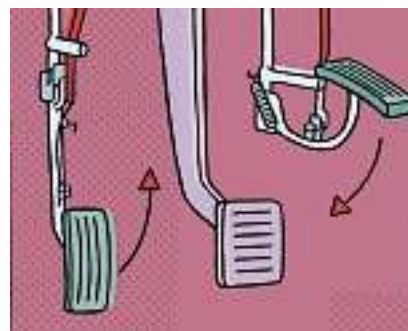
Pushbutton clutches have a touch sensitive switch mounted on the gear stick (around £1,000 to £1,500+). Some clutches work automatically as soon as the gear stick is moved.

Types of semi-automatic clutch vary from mechanical levers to servo-assisted systems. All require manual dexterity so are best avoided.

If you drive an adapted manual car but your driving licence is for automatics only, you must make sure the clutch pedal is removed.

Accelerating and braking If your legs are weak, pedals can be power assisted to reduce the effort needed to use them, or they can be made to work with little movement.

If your right leg is affected, consider having an automatic car and a flip up left foot accelerator fitted on the left side of the brake pedal (around £300). Have a twin flip type so that when one accelerator is flipped down, the other



moves up out of the way. Do take driving lessons to learn to drive this way. Some people who have difficulty

moving their right foot from accelerator to brake pedal use the right foot to accelerate and left to brake in an automatic car. Again, this will need a lot of practice.

Hand controls If you cannot use foot pedals at all, different types of hand control can be fitted on an automatic car – floor mounted ones might suit you. Take advice from your doctor or therapist on whether hand controls are likely to aggravate your arthritis. See our *Car controls* guide for more information.

Parking brake Bolt on attachments make using the brake easier. These include simple levers to take the effort out of pushing the release button and handles you pull to operate the whole brake. These cost from £60. There are also electric brakes with on and off press buttons, ranging in price from around £700.

Secondary controls

These are used for things like lights, indicators and horn and there are many simple attachments to make them easier to use – such as extended indicator stalks.

There are also infrared systems with switches for all secondary controls. They



can be fitted and adjusted to meet your needs but might be too fiddly. Getting used to an infrared control can take practice as you need to find the right button by touch. Many do not have automatically cancelling indicators.

There are also bleeper and tone systems – press one button to control several functions by pressing until you reach the one you want. Voice control systems work by spoken command and are programmed to act on only your voice.

Prices of these vary widely depending on how complex the adaptations are and also on the type of wiring system your vehicle has. They start at about £750. Check a system's compatibility with your car with an adaptation specialist.

Mirrors A panoramic mirror (around £20 from adaptation firms) can be placed over or replace a standard rear view mirror and will be particularly helpful if you have severe neck stiffness. Stick on 'blind spot' mirrors (from £2 in motor accessory shops) extend what you can see in door mirrors.

Other ways of driving

Nearly all controls can be altered or adapted to suit you and complete systems built around you if necessary. Obviously the more equipment you need and the more it has to be adapted, the higher the cost. You will certainly need a thorough assessment at a Mobility Centre and specialist instruction for systems that involve driving in a very different way.

Further information

Blue Badge scheme

Allows disabled people to park in restricted areas, but do read and follow the conditions of use carefully. Details from the Department for Transport Mobility and Inclusion Unit: 020 7944 2914; www.dft.gov.uk and follow Access for Disabled People link.

Hiring a car

There are a few adapted cars for hire. Lists of firms that supply them are available from Mobility Centres and from Tripscope (see p11).

Service call

For £9.95 (inc p& p) you can buy an infrared ServiceCall Transmitter to call for service at thousands of participating outlets, such as garages and shops. This is particularly helpful when filling up at a self-service station. More information from www.service-call.net or call 0800 458 3008.

Finance

Listed below are the various ways you may be able to finance a car. See the Ricabilty guides for more information.

Cash – you may be able to negotiate a greater discount if paying up front.

Personal loan – lets you own the car from the start – flexible payment periods, during which you pay interest.

Hire purchase – you pay a deposit and repayments with interest, usually over two to five years, and own the car at the end.

Personal contract plan and lease purchase – you pay a deposit and monthly payments; at the end of the contract you can hand the car back or buy it at a prearranged price.

Motability – Contract Hire and Hire Purchase Schemes set up for disabled people, using the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement. May also be able to offer help in the form of a grant.

Charities – you may be able to get an individual grant from local charities (check your library for sources).

Statutory sources – social services may be able to help you with costs if you do not get DLA. Or if you are in or applying for a job, try the Access to Work scheme; contact your local Job Centre.

VAT exemption – you do not pay VAT on adaptations, their installation, repairs nor maintenance. If you use a wheelchair or stretcher, you may not have to pay VAT on the purchase price of an adapted car; information from HM Revenue and Customs.

Vehicle Excise Duty (Road Tax) – you don't have to pay this on your car if you get the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the DLA or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement; get an exemption certificate from the Disability Living Allowance Unit (08457 123456) or the Veterans Agency (0800 169 2277).

Car insurance – under the Disability Discrimination Act, insurers are not allowed to refuse disabled drivers insurance or charge extra without justifying evidence. Shop around for the best deal. Mobility Centres and organisations of disabled motorists have lists of companies that specialise in insurance for disabled drivers.

Helpful organisations

Arthritis Care

Freephone helpline: 0808 800 4050
(M-F 12-4pm)

National rate helpline: 020 7380 6555
(M-F 10-4)

Email: helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk

Web: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

- Information and support through a confidential helpline – information devised with and for people with arthritis plus local services and groups

- Self management and awareness training; runs four hotels; campaigns locally and nationally for equality and inclusion

Arthritis Research Campaign

Tel: 0870 850 5000

Email: info@arc.org.uk

Web: www.arc.org.uk

- Raises funds for medical research into the cause, treatment and cure of arthritis
- Produces wide range of free publications

Disability Benefits

Helpline: 08457 123456

Web: www.disabilitybenefits.co.uk

Disabled Drivers' Association

Tel: 0870 770 3333

Email: hq@dda.org.uk

Web: www.dda.org.uk

- Help and advice to disabled drivers and passengers; local groups

Disabled Drivers' Motor Club

Tel: 01832 734724

Email: info@ddmc.org.uk

Web: www.ddmc.org.uk

- Help and advice on mobility to disabled people

Disabled Living Foundation

Helpline: 0845 130 9177 (10-4)

Text: 020 7432 8009

Web: www.dlf.org.uk

- Advice and information on disability equipment

Disabled Motorists Federation

Tel/Fax: 0191 416 3172

Email: jkillick2214@compuserve.com

Web: www.freewebs.com/dmfed

- Umbrella organisation for disabled motorists' clubs; also independent membership available; provides information on mobility

DVLA

Tel (Medical Unit): 0870 600 0301

Web: www.dvla.gov.uk

In Northern Ireland:

Tel (Medical Section): 028 7034 1469

Web: www.dvlni.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

Freephone: 0800 559 3636

Email: enquiries@mobility-centres.org.uk

Web: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

- National information service on driving, devices and vehicle adaptations
- Location of all independent, accredited Mobility Centres

HM Revenue and Customs

Tel: 0845 010 9000

Text: 0845 000 0200

Web: www.hmrc.gov.uk

- VAT relief (VAT Notice 701/7) and motor vehicles (VAT Notice 701/59) for disabled people

Magic

Freephone: 0800 240 241

Email: help@fordmagic.co.uk

Web: www.fordmagic.co.uk

- Information on cars, adaptations and general mobility queries

Mobility Roadshow

In England and Scotland organised by Mobility Choice

Tel: 0870 770 3222

Email: choice@gtinet.gov.uk

Web: www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk

In Northern Ireland organised by Disability Action

Tel: 028 9029 7880

Email: marketing@disabilityaction.org

Web: www.disabilityaction.org

- Free event with advice, demonstrations and test drives on cars and mobility products and services

Motability

Tel: 0845 456 4566

Text: 01279 632273

Web: www.motability.co.uk

- Schemes to finance your vehicle

REMAP

Tel: 0845 130 0456

Email: info@remap.org.uk

Web: www.remap.org.uk

- Voluntary engineers who design and manufacture devices when there is nothing else on the market

REMAP (Scotland)

Tel: 01294 832 566

Email: golderjohn@hotmail.com

Tripscope

Tel/Text: 08457 585641

Email: enquiries@tripscope.org.uk

Web: www.tripscope.org.uk

- Information and advice on travelling with a disability on public and private transport



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering
people with arthritis.*

ricability

Ricability is a charity that researches and publishes information on products and services for older and disabled people

30 Angel Gate, City Road, London EC1V 2PT

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Fax: 020 7427 2468

Text: 020 7427 2469

E-mail: mail@ricability.org.uk

Web: www.ricability.org.uk

Ricability gratefully acknowledges funding from the Department for Transport. The authors of this report are employed by Ricability. Any views expressed are not necessarily the views of the Department for Transport. Our thanks also go to Arthritis Care and the Forum of Mobility Centres for their guidance.

Research:	Lindsey Etchell, Ngaio Girdlestone
Design:	Price Watkins
Illustrations:	Clive Goodyer
Photography:	Robin Beckham
Printing:	WPG

ISBN: 0 900621 75 3

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