

Motoring with arthritis

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This Rica booklet outlines some of the key things to think about when choosing or adapting a vehicle for someone who has arthritis. We tell you about useful features on standard cars and the specialist products and techniques that might help you.

This information comes from consultation with people with arthritis and other experts. Product and price information comes from Rica's market research – use it as a guide only and shop around for the best price.

More detailed guidance on choosing and using a car can be found in the Rica guides shown here. Request free copies by post or read them on our website:

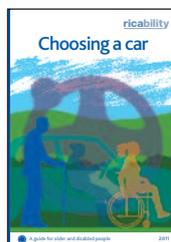
020 7427 2460

www.rica.org.uk

The website also has the **Carsearch** tool that lets you search for cars by their measurements and will help you find a car to suit you.

Mobility address list

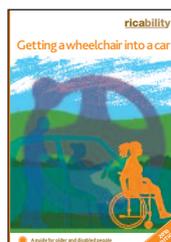
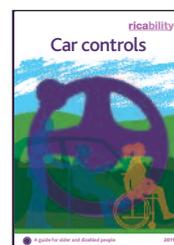
Addresses of all adaptation suppliers and car converters in the UK and details of the services they offer



Choosing a car

Details of features that may help you and ways of adapting a car

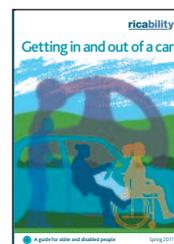
Car controls
Information on adapted controls for driving, the different types and how to get them



Getting a wheelchair into a car

Information on equipment to help you stow or carry a wheelchair

Getting in and out of a car
Techniques that may help and details of equipment that is available



Wheelchair accessible vehicles

Information on converted vehicles to carry you in your wheelchair

Family cars
Issues affecting families of disabled children and information about cars and standard and specialist equipment



Driving with arthritis

Having a car and being able to drive can provide a great deal of independence. However, pain, weakness and stiff joints can make it difficult to get in and out of a car and use the controls. Sitting in the same position for a long period of time can also lead to backache and tiredness.

You must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and your insurance company if your arthritis affects your ability to drive, especially if you need adapted controls.

For further information:

- go to www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions or
- get *What you need to know about driving licences (D100)* from a Post Office.

If you wear splints to support your joints, ask your Occupational Therapist (OT) if it's appropriate to wear them when driving. If they make driving difficult, the OT may adapt them.

If you have recently had surgery, ask your doctor to advise you when it will be safe to drive again.

Learning to drive

If you are learning to drive or returning to driving with adaptations, you will benefit from lessons with a specialist instructor. They use cars with adapted controls or will teach you in your own vehicle. DMUK or your Mobility Centre (see page 10) will help you find an instructor locally.

Plan of action

1 Ask some basic questions

Think about what you may need in future as well as about what suits you now.

Prepare to compromise as you may not find everything in one car.

How will you get in and out? Do you need wide or high doors, or specialist equipment to help? See *Products and techniques* (page 5).

Will you be comfortable in the seat? And will you be able to reach the controls?

Will you need specialist controls? There is a big range – from simple gadgets to more complex controls (see pages 6-8).

What equipment will you carry? Think about everyday and occasional use.

Do you use a wheelchair? Will you load it into the boot or travel sitting in it? Will you need extra space for specialist equipment?

2 Collect information

Start with motoring magazines, the internet and manufacturers' brochures. You can also try the following:

Disability Now

(www.disabilitynow.org.uk) has reviews and articles by disabled drivers.

Disabled Motoring UK (see page 10) publishes a monthly magazine with reviews and articles.

Mobility Centres (see page 10) offer driving assessments and tell you what equipment will suit you. Charges vary from centre to centre – up to £130. It's free in Scotland if you are referred by a GP. It's free UK-wide under Motability's Managed Adaptation Programme.

Mobility Roadshows and **Motability One Big Day** (see page 11) to see and try out vehicles and adaptations.

Motability (see page 11) have a list of accredited car dealers with specialist knowledge and facilities for disabled people. They have free guides, in print and on their website.

3 Try out before buying

Try any car you are considering. Dealers may bring one to your house 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 also tell you if the adaptations can be fitted to your chosen car.

4 Get plenty of practice

Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car. Your adaptation company may have a demonstration model and they must give you the chance to try your adapted car before you take it away.

Mobility Centres can help you find specialist driving instructors locally.

Car search

- **Rica has an online database of car measurements.**
- **Search for cars with wide doors, low sills or lots of headroom or look for a boot to fit your wheelchair.**
- **Go to www.rica.org.uk and follow the link for the Car search tool.**

Choosing a car

Cars with automatic transmission and power assisted steering can be easier to drive if you don't have much strength in your shoulders, hands or arms. Other helpful features such as height-adjustable seats and steering are found on a wide range of cars too. The less a car has to be modified, the higher its resale value.

If you are going to get a standard car, use the list below to tick the features you might find useful. Alternatively, *Products and techniques* (pages 5-8) tells you about equipment that might help.

GETTING IN AND OUT

If your joints are stiff and painful, you may need a large door opening, so you can get in and out without having to bend too much. If you have weakness or tenderness, or find reaching difficult, smaller doors are easier. Two and three door cars generally have wider doorways than four and five door ones. Look for:

- doors which move smoothly and aren't stiff
- door openings that suit your needs
- no sills or low, narrow sills
- conveniently placed handholds
- seat heights that suit you
- electrically operated seats which adjust both ways, so you get the best position for getting in and for driving.

LOCKING AND IGNITION

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

PRIMARY CONTROLS

For steering, braking and accelerating:

- automatic transmission can make driving less stressful and make the controls easier 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
- handbrakes can be stiff if you have a weak hand and wrist – check that you can put it on and off
- some cars have electronic, push button handbrakes and you can have one fitted to many others.

SECONDARY CONTROLS

For things like the horn, lights and indicators. Try to find a model where these are in the best position for you and look for:

- electric windows
- electric and heated door mirrors
- panoramic rear view mirror
- heated windscreen
- automatic wipers and lights
- parking distance sensor – sounds if you are near an obstacle
- reversing camera
- park assist – steers the car into the parking space for parallel parking.

BOOT

Look for:

- no sill or low sill
- boot lid you can reach when it's open
- powered boot opening/closing – you can have this fitted to most cars
- internal boot release
- space for your wheelchair, mobility scooter or other equipment.

Products and techniques

If your arthritis makes it difficult, tiring or painful to get in and out or drive a standard car, there is a range of equipment and adaptations available to help. These pages, and our other guides (see page 2), give more information. You can also get individual advice from a Mobility Centre (see page 10).

The equipment and adaptations described here are available from specialist suppliers and installers. You can find these in our *Mobility address list*.

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

Accessories

- **Easifuel holds the trigger open on petrol pumps (£2.99; call 020 8302 8858 to try before you buy).**
- **Car Caddie and Handybar provide an additional hand hold when getting in and out. One attaches to the top of the window frame, the other to the door catch. From aids suppliers.**
- **ServiceCall allows you to call for service at participating outlets, including filling stations. More information from www.service-call.net or call 0800 458 3008.**
- **A Blue Badge lets you park in restricted areas. The rules are different in different places. From your local authority.**

GETTING IN AND OUT

The best way to get in is to sit first then turn and bring your legs in, doing the reverse to get out.

- To help get your legs in, try looping a stiff length of webbing or a walking stick over your foot to pull it by hand over the door sill.
- To help with swivelling in, you can simply put a plastic bag on the seat, or use a specialist swivelling cushion. Make sure you remove it for the journey.
- Specialist swivelling seats are available from £1000. See our guide *Getting in and out of a car* for more information.
- To help you reach the seat belt and wear it comfortably, many newer cars have adjustable seat belt fixings. You can also get accessories to make the belt easier to reach or adjust its position. The straps need to cross your shoulder and fit low across the pelvis, avoiding your stomach.
- If reaching the boot to close it is a problem, you can fit an electronic boot closer or try fixing a strap to it – from motoring and specialist suppliers.

Wheelchair users

There are transfer boards and other devices to help you from a wheelchair into the seat. Hoists and lifts can help you stow your wheelchair in the car. Some automatically stow the chair on the roof or in the back of the car after you have transferred to the seat. See our guides *Getting in and out of a car* and *Getting a wheelchair into a car* (see page 2) for more information.

Alternatively, you can get a wheelchair accessible vehicle, where you travel in your wheelchair (see our guide *Wheelchair accessible vehicles*).

PRIMARY CONTROLS

Steering

You can make the steering wheel rim easier and less painful to grip by padding it with foam tape or a thick wheel cover.

If you have to steer one-handed, for example if you have hand controls, you can fit a steering ball or spinner to the steering wheel.

Spinners come in several shapes to suit different types of grip and most cost between £10 and £110.

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.
- Take plenty of breaks to avoid getting stiff. Leave enough time for this.
- Make sure any painkillers you use when driving do not cause drowsiness or otherwise affect your ability to drive.

Changing gear

Automatic transmission means fewer gear changes and also helps with pulling away if you have hill start assist.

Usually automatics have a mechanical gear selector, which you operate with your left hand. If you cannot do this, you can have an electronic system fitted, but these are expensive and may not be appropriate. Take advice from a Mobility Centre before investing in these systems.



Electronic gear selector – Adaptacar

Some manual cars have automated gear systems which work without using a clutch pedal. You move a lever or use push buttons or paddles on the steering wheel to select a gear.

If you can operate the gear stick, but not the clutch pedal, you can get an adapted clutch that you operate with the hand that you use to change gear (from £1,975). More on this in our *Car controls* guide (see page 2)

Accelerating and braking

Left foot accelerator

If you can use one foot, you may be able to drive an unadapted automatic car. If it is your left foot, one option is to fit an accelerator on the left side of the brake pedal, for around £300-500.

So that other people can drive the car, these are removable or made so that you can flip the other pedal down.



Flip-up left foot accelerator – Jeff Gosling

Warning

- **Left foot accelerators take a lot of getting used to, especially if you are used to driving an unadapted manual car. There have been a number of accidents involving drivers who aren't used to them.**
- **You must have a professional driving assessment before ordering a left foot accelerator and lessons with a qualified instructor before you start to use one on the road.**

Hand controls

If you cannot use foot pedals at all, different types of hand control can be fitted on an automatic car. Ask for advice from your doctor or therapist on whether hand controls are likely to aggravate your arthritis.

There are a few different types of hand control. They can be powered and the amount of force you need to operate them can be adjusted. You can fit a footrest, shaped to suit you (from £75), and a guard to stop your feet interfering with the pedals (from £100). See our *Car controls* guide (see page 2) for more information and advice.



Single lever accelerator and brake – here fitted with optional indicator switch – Jeff Gosling

Combined controls

- steering column mounted – push the lever to brake and pull it towards you to accelerate (from £400)
- a radial lever that you use clockwise to accelerate and push away to brake (from £700)
- floor mounted push-pull levers – position and strength needed can be adjusted to suit you (from £800)



Floor-mounted Menox Carospeed – Autoadapt

- clamp on controls simply bolt on to the pedals (£350) – best as a short term option.

Separate accelerators and brakes

- there is a wider range of separate hand controls for accelerating; use with floor mounted brakes (from £550)
- accelerator rings (from £1,800) need less effort and let you steer with both hands on the wheel; they don't interfere with the steering wheel adjustment.



K5 under ring – Autoadapt

Parking brake

Mechanical attachments are simple to fit and can make it easier to use the handbrake (from £70). Electronic parking brakes cost from around £700.

SECONDARY CONTROLS

If you have difficulty using controls for the lights and indicators, there are simple and complex solutions.

If you need to work the indicator with your right hand, you can have an extension fitted to the indicator stalk that takes it over the steering column.



Indicators extension – Alfred Bekker

If you have more complex needs, electronic systems can be fitted that bring all the secondary controls together in one unit. They are operated by hand or by nudging with your head or something else. Some work with just one button.



Steering knob combined with wireless secondary controls – Lodgesons

Prices vary widely depending on how complex the controls are and on the wiring system of the car (from £700).

Check the cost of any adaptation before ordering it. Also check that it is compatible with your car.

Mirrors

A panoramic mirror (around £25 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.

Finance

Motability – Scheme for people receiving the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement (see page 11 for more information).

Access to Work – May help if you are working or about to start work. Go to www.gov.uk/access-to-work or ask at your Jobcentre.

Charities – To find a grant maker try:

- your library for local charities such as the Round Table or the Rotary or Lions Clubs
- Charity Search – help people over 50 find a grant-giving charity:
0117 982 4060 (9.30am-2.30pm)
www.charitysearch.org.uk
- Turn2Us – a website for people in financial need:
0808 802 2000 (8am-8pm)
www.turn2us.org.uk
- contacting local or national support groups (see pages 10-11).

VAT exemption – You do not have to pay VAT on adaptations or their installation, repairs or maintenance. You may not have to pay VAT on the purchase and maintenance of an adapted car. Talk to your supplier or see information available from HM Revenue and Customs (see page 11).

Vehicle Excise Duty (Road Tax) – You don't have to pay this if you get the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement. Get an exemption certificate from the Disability Benefits Helpline (08457 123456) or the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (0800 169 2277).

Car insurance – Under the Equality Act 2010, insurance companies are not allowed to refuse disabled drivers insurance or charge extra without justifying evidence. Shop around for the best deal. If you have a heavily adapted car, Mobility Centres and DMUK (see page 10) have lists of companies that specialise in disabled drivers.

Further information

Arthritis Care

- Free information on living with arthritis devised with and for people living with the condition, plus local services and support groups
- online discussion forums for people sharing tips on the challenges of life with arthritis
- self-management and awareness training
- local and national campaigning for equality and inclusion for people living with arthritis.

Freephone confidential helpline:
0808 800 4050 (10am-4pm)
Email: info@arthritiscare.org.uk
www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Research UK

- Funds for medical research into the causes, treatment and cure of arthritis
 - information and free publications.
- Tel: 0300 790 0400
Email: enquiries@arthritisresearchuk.org
www.arthritisresearchuk.org

Blue Badge Network

- Information, news and ideas on disability issues and concessions.
- Tel: 01384 257001
Email:
headoffice@bluebadgenetwork.org.uk
www.bluebadgenetwork.org.uk

Disability Benefits Helpline

- Government information service.
- Tel: 08457 123456
www.dwp.gov.uk or
www.gov.uk/browse/benefits

Disabled Living Foundation

- Advice and information on equipment.
- Tel: 0845 130 9177 (10am-4pm)
www.dlf.org.uk
www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Disabled Motoring UK (DMUK)

- The campaigning charity for disabled motorists. They run the Baywatch campaign against parking abuse and represent disabled people's needs at a national level. Membership £20 per year – includes monthly magazine.

Ashwellthorpe
Norwich NR16 1EX
Tel: 01508 489449
Fax: 01508 488173
Email: info@disabledmotoring.org
www.disabledmotoring.org

DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency)

Drivers Medical Group
Tel: 0300 790 6806
Fax: 0845 850 0095
Email: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk
www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/medical
www.gov.uk/browse/driving

Driver & Vehicle Agency (Northern Ireland)

Driver Licensing Medical Section
Tel: 0845 402 4000
Email: dvlni@doeni.gov.uk
www.dvni.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

- A network of independent, accredited Mobility Centres which will: assess your driving and give you advice about how to make it safer, easier and more comfortable; give advice to

carers; in some cases, help you find a specialist driving instructor

- national information service on driving, specialist equipment and vehicle adaptations.

Freephone: 0800 559 3636

www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Get Going Live

- Free events for young disabled motorists.

Tel: 0845 241 0390

www.getgoingnow.org

HM Revenue and Customs

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

Tel: 0845 302 0203

Textphone: 0845 000 0200

www.hmrc.gov.uk

The Mobility Roadshow

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

Mobility Choice

Tel: 0845 241 0390

Email: choice@gtnet.gov.uk

www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk

Motability

- You can use your Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement to lease a car. Maintenance and servicing, insurance and breakdown assistance are included. Motability contribute towards the cost of adaptations.
- You may have to make an advance payment to cover the cost of the car.

Tel: 0845 456 4566

Textphone: 0845 675 0009

www.motability.co.uk

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society

- Only UK charity for Rheumatoid Arthritis, providing free information and support
- booklets, online forums and local groups.

Freephone confidential helpline:

0800 298 7650 (9.30am-4.30pm)

Email: enquiries@nras.org.uk

www.nras.org.uk

One Big Day

- Motability run these regional events for customers and people interested in the scheme – you can see and test drive cars and adaptations.

Tel: 0800 953 4002

www.motabilityevents.co.uk

Remap

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

Remap England, Wales and NI

Tel: 0845 130 0456

Email: info@remap.org.uk

www.remap.org.uk

Remap Scotland

Tel: 01466 730736

Email: remap-scotland@btconnect.com

www.remap-scotland.org

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Motability Tenth Anniversary Trust

■ Motability has teamed up with leading home, pet and travel insurers. For full details of the Motability Insurance range, visit www.motability.co.uk or call direct:

HOME Insurance: 0800 783 0061

PET Insurance: 0800 369 9094

TRAVEL Insurance: 0800 519 9957

■ For every policy sold, the insurance providers will pay a proportion of the premium to Motability to help disabled people remain mobile.