



Motoring with multiple sclerosis

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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 multiple sclerosis (MS).

This information comes from consultation with people with multiple sclerosis 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. Call us to request free copies or read them on our website:

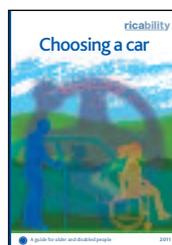
020 7427 2460

www.rica.org.uk

The website also has the **Carsearch** page 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

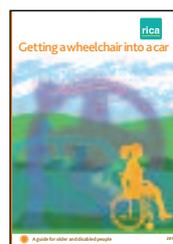


Choosing a car

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

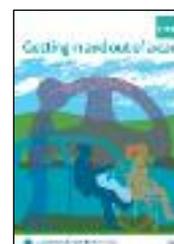


Getting a wheelchair into a car

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 MS

Multiple sclerosis is unpredictable and can affect people in many ways. Some symptoms are common but people will experience different symptoms. In addition, MS symptoms themselves can vary from being mild to severe, and they may be temporary or permanent.

Some common MS symptoms that may affect driving include the following:

- sensory (touch) problems such as numbness or tingling hands and feet
- visual problems such as blurred or double vision, or a temporary loss of sight caused by optic neuritis (inflammation of the optic nerve)
- fatigue – an overwhelming sense of tiredness making physical or mental activity difficult
- loss of muscle strength and dexterity
- problems with walking, balance and co-ordination
- muscle stiffness and spasms – tightening or rigidity in particular muscle groups (known as spasticity)
- difficulty with memory and thinking.

You have to tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) that you have been diagnosed with MS. They will assess your fitness to drive using the information you provide and may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment.

You may be:

- given a full licence
- given a medical review licence, valid for one, two or three years
- given a licence that specifies which adaptations you need to use
- in extreme cases, told to stop driving.

A small loss of muscle control will not necessarily affect your ability to drive a car but people are required to show sufficient dexterity to operate the car controls safely. See page 6 for the wide range of adaptations available that can help with some of these. If you need adaptations to drive, then these will be specified on your licence. You are not allowed to drive a car without them.

Memory and concentration, spatial awareness of the position of things and clear mental processing of information are also important to drivers. An assessment at a Mobility Centre (see Forum of Mobility Centres page 11) can help identify and address any problems.

You also need to tell your insurance company about your condition and about any adaptations you have.

For further information, go to www.gov.uk/dvla or get the leaflet *What you need to know about driving licences* (D100) from a post office. For more information on MS, contact the MS Society (see page 11).

Remember that many people with MS carry on driving confidently and safely for many years.

Advice from drivers with MS

- **Try out a car and any adaptations on one of your worst days, not when you're feeling well.**
- **Be prepared to compromise but don't omit your 'must have' features.**
- **Get advice from an independent Mobility Centre.**



Choosing a car

You may well be able to continue driving an unadapted car for some time, particularly if it has automatic transmission and power steering. If your condition is progressive, think ahead to what you may need in the future.

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.

GETTING IN AND OUT

If your legs are weak or painful, you may need a large door opening so you can get in and out without having to bend them too much.

If you have weakness in your arms and find reaching difficult, smaller doors are easier. Two and three door cars generally have wider doorways than four and five door ones.

Also look for:

- no sills or low, narrow sills
- conveniently placed handholds
- seat height that best suits you
- seats which go up and down, forwards and back – useful if you need space to get your legs in but sit closer to the wheel for driving.

LOCKING AND IGNITION

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

PRIMARY CONTROLS

For steering, braking and accelerating.

Look for:

- automatic transmission – this 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.

Also look for:

- electric windows
- electric and heated door mirrors
- heated windscreen
- automatic wipers and lights
- easy controls for audio equipment, air conditioning etc – some cars have voice activated controls
- parking sensor – sounds if you are near an obstacle
- reversing camera.

BOOT

Look for:

- no sill or low sill
- powered boot opening/closing
- internal boot release
- space for your wheelchair if you have one.

Plan of action

1 Ask some basic questions

Think about what you may need in the 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 6).

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?

Find a car

- use Rica's online search tool of car measurements at www.rica.org.uk/car-search
- search for cars with eg wide doors, low sills or lots of headroom or look for a boot to fit your wheelchair

2 Collect information

Start with motoring magazines, the internet and manufacturers' brochures as well as the monthly magazine published by Disabled Motoring UK (see page 10). www.youreable.com has an online discussion forum covering topics

including benefits and motoring.

3 Try out before buying

Try any car you are considering. Try getting in and out several times. If you already use any adaptations, ask if you can try the car with them fitted.

Tip

- To try out a range of different cars all in the same place, visit a secondhand car supermarket.

If you need more specialist help, you can try out adapted cars at adaptation companies. They will also tell you if the adaptations can be fitted to your chosen car. You could also visit one of these:

Mobility Centres (see page 11) for a driving assessment and to find out what equipment may suit you.

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

4 Get plenty of practice

If you are getting adapted driving controls, it is advisable to have lessons with a specialist instructor. This is essential if you are getting a left foot accelerator (see page 7).

Mobility Centres (see page 11) can help you find an instructor locally. They will give you lessons in their own adapted car, or in some cases in your own car.

Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car.

Products and techniques

If you lose sensation, strength or control in your arms or legs, consider the adaptations available. The earlier you convert to new controls, the more confidently you are likely to drive. See the following pages and our other guides. You can also get individual advice from a Mobility Centre (see page 11).

Gadgets

- **Pump Pal holds petrol pumps open – useful if you have weak grip or can only use one hand (£9.99 from www.pumppal.co.uk).**
- **Handybar fits quickly into the door catch to give you a firm handhold for getting in and out (£30 from adaptation firms, motoring suppliers and general aids suppliers).**
- **Car Caddie is a strap that attaches to the top of the door to give you a firm handle as you stand up or sit down (around £20 from motoring suppliers and general aids suppliers).**

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.

You can have the door hinges modified or the seat runners extended to give you more space to get in and out. You can convert your existing seat – make it higher or height adjustable, or add a swivelling mechanism – or have a

specialist replacement seat fitted. Costs start at about £1,250 from adaptation firms. See our guide *Getting in and out of a car* for more information.

Wheelchair users

If you have a manual wheelchair, you may be able to lift it into the back of the car and walk the few steps to the seat. However, if you can't, there is a range of devices and techniques for getting you and the wheelchair into your car. See our guides *Getting in and out of a car* and *Getting a wheelchair into a car* for more information.

PRIMARY CONTROLS

Steering

If you steer one handed, you will need a grip fitted to the steering wheel – a steering ball or spinner – and power assisted steering.

Spinners come in several shapes to suit different types of grip and most cost between £15 and £110.



Steering wheel grips from Alfred Bekker

Changing gears

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, from 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.



Controls on steering wheel

If you can operate the gear stick, but not the clutch pedal, you can get an adapted clutch that you operate with the same hand you use to change gear (from £2,145). See our *Car controls* guide.



Gear stick mounted Duck clutch, from ELAP

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

Accelerating and braking

If the strength or control of your legs is poor, you can have more brake assistance added to reduce the effort required.

If one of your legs is affected, you may be able to drive an unmodified automatic car. If it is your right leg, one option is to have a flip up left foot accelerator fitted on the left side of the brake pedal, for around £400-500.

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 or don't want to get a left foot accelerator, different types of hand control system can be fitted on an automatic car. These are described on the following pages.

The pedals cannot be removed but you can fit a guard to stop your feet from getting caught in them (from £100).



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 £900)



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 wide 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, arm or leg. 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. Your adaptation company will advise on this.

OTHER WAYS OF DRIVING

Nearly all controls can be altered or adapted to suit you and complete systems built around you if necessary. You will need a thorough assessment at a Mobility Centre and specialist instruction for systems that involve driving in a very different way.

Finance

Motability – Scheme for people receiving the Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) or the 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. Phone 0345 268 8499, ask at your Jobcentre or go to www.direct.gov.uk/disabledpeople.

Grants – Contact the MS Society Grants Team (see page 11) for information about grants for vehicle adaptations.

Alternatively, try:

- Charity Search – provide a free service for people over 50, to help find a grant-giving charity
Tel: 0117 982 4060 (9am-2.30pm)
www.charitysearch.org.uk
- Turn2Us – a website for people in financial need: www.turn2us.org.uk
- contacting local support groups (see pages 10-11)
- your library for local charities such as the Round Table or the Rotary or Lions Clubs.

VAT exemption on adaptations – You do not have to pay VAT on adaptations, or in some cases on the purchase and maintenance of an adapted car. Information 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 or PIP, War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement or AFIP. You can claim disability exemption when you apply for vehicle tax
www.gov.uk/vehicle-exempt-from-vehicle-tax.

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 pages 10-11) have lists of companies that specialise in insuring disabled drivers.

Further information

Blue Badge Scheme

Allows disabled people to park in restricted areas. The rules are different in different places so do read and follow the conditions of use carefully. The scheme is administered by local authorities who deal with applications and issue badges. Contact your local authority for more information or phone:

0844 463 0213 (England)
0844 463 0214 (Scotland)
0844 463 0215 (Wales)

blue.badge@northgate-is.com
www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Brain and Spine Foundation

- research, education and information
- help and advice to people affected by brain and spine disorders.

Freephone 0808 808 1000

Email helpline@brainandspine.org.uk
www.brainandspine.org.uk

Demand

- national charity that designs, makes and repairs specialist equipment for disabled people
- online shop selling new and second hand specialist sporting and mobility equipment.

Tel 01923 681 800
Email: info@demand.org.uk
demandequipment.com

Disability Benefits Helplines

For information and advice about an existing claim.

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Tel 08457 123456

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Tel 0845 850 3322

www.gov.uk/disability-benefits-helpline

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

- advice and information on disability equipment
- training for professionals.

Tel 0300 999 0004 (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 £24 per year – includes monthly magazine.

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.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions

Driver & Vehicle Agency (Northern Ireland)

Driver Licensing Medical Section

Tel 0845 402 4000

Email dva@doeni.gov.uk

www.dvani.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

- network of independent, accredited Mobility Centres which will carry out driving assessments, advise drivers, passengers and carers and in some cases help you find a specialist driving instructor
- national information service on driving, equipment and adaptations.

Freephone 0800 559 3636

Email mobility@rcht.cornwall.nhs.uk
www.mobility-centres.org.uk

HM Revenue and Customs

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

Tel 0300 123 1073

www.gov.uk/hmrc

Motability

- Use Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or AFIP or your 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.
- Motability have useful information, including videos on choosing a car and driving adaptations on their website.

Tel 0300 456 4566

Textphone 0300 037 0100

www.motability.co.uk

Multiple Sclerosis Trust

- UK charity providing information for anyone affected by multiple sclerosis.

Tel 0800 032 3839

Email info@mstrust.org.uk

www.mstrust.org.uk

One Big Day/Big Event

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

Tel 0300 456 4566

www.motabilityevents.co.uk

Positive about MS

- website dedicated to give information and support to people who have Multiple Sclerosis, or who are affected by the condition.

Email kaz@positiveaboutms.com

www.positiveaboutms.com

Multiple Sclerosis Society

■ UK's largest charity dedicated to supporting everyone whose life is touched by MS.

■ Funds research into MS and campaigns to improve treatment and care.

■ Provides emotional, practical and financial support to people with MS and their carers and families.

Tel 0808 800 8000

Email helpline@mssociety.org.uk

www.mssociety.org.uk

Grants

Tel 020 8438 0700

(ask for grants team)

Email grants@mssociety.org.uk



Consumer research for older
and disabled people.

Rica is an independent charity
that publishes information on
products and services for older
and disabled people.

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Email: mail@rica.org.uk

www.rica.org.uk

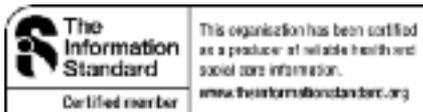


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forum of mobility centres



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