

How to set up your driving position

Achieving the right seating and hand position in the car cannot only keep you comfortable it can keep you safe as well. Here are some tips to get you in the right driving position.

Diagram 1

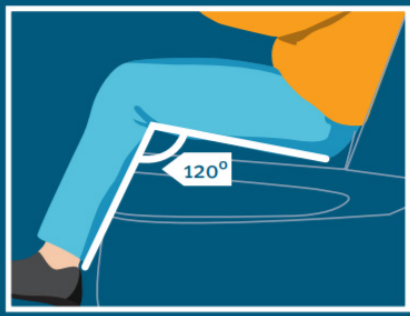


Diagram 2

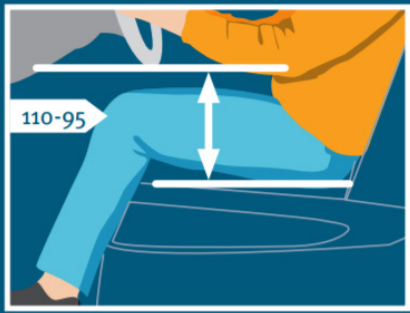
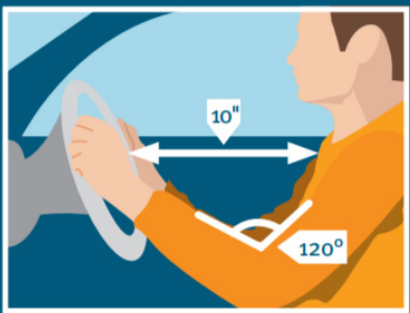


Diagram 3

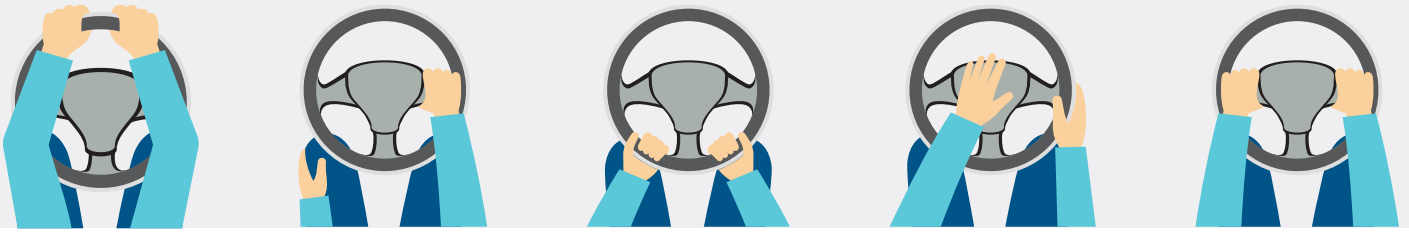


Steps to setting up your seat

- Begin by pushing your seat all the way back, place it as low to the floor as possible, and recline the backrest 30° – 40°.
- While sitting in your seat, bring its height up until you can comfortably see the road and display panel, with your hips as high as your knees (See diagram 1). You should avoid driving with your neck in an awkward or uncomfortable position.
- Move the seat forward to enable you to reach and completely depress all foot pedals without coming away from the seat back. This is especially important for the clutch in metro areas.
- Adjust the backrest to a 95° – 105° angle. Adjust your headrest so it rests in the middle of your head. If possible adjust the lumbar support so that you have even back support, with pressure applied to the small curve in your lower back. This should be supportive and comfortable.
- Tilt the seat cushion until it evenly supports your entire thigh, without pressure in particular areas, and does not hit the back of your knees (See diagram 2).
- Adjust the seatbelt to fit you instead of adjusting the seat to accommodate the seatbelt position.
- When your hands are held at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock on the steering wheel, your thumbs are ideally in front of your shoulders. Bring the steering wheel down and towards you to minimise reach, but not so it touches the thighs. Ideally there should be an angle of 120° at the elbow when driving (See diagram 3).
- When adjusting the mirrors, you should easily see your mirrors within a total rotation of 60° of the neck. You should not have to adopt awkward or strained position to view the mirrors.

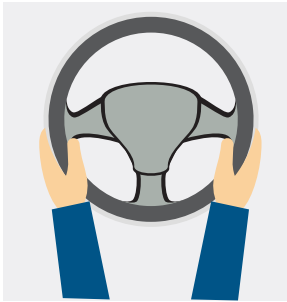
Please note

- If you are too low when seated, try adding a cushion or wedge to the seat.
- A lumbar cushion can be added if your seat lacks sufficient lumbar support.
- On freeways or longer country trips, lower your hands to the bottom of the steering wheel.



Hand positions when driving

There are many ways people steer their vehicles including; one-handed, half-handed, using the palm of one hand, using a single finger, or even no-handed using the knees. None of these practises work in an emergency situation. Holding the steering wheel in the wrong position can make a big contribution to most accidents especially when they are caused by fatigue. You must keep both hands on the wheel at all times unless changing gears or indicating. It doesn't matter whether you're driving an automatic or a manual as the law is the same across Australia.



Long distance driving

During long distance drives, holding the steering in the 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock position causes the least risk of muscle fatigue and other injuries to drivers. The rate of onset of muscle fatigue is less while using the 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock position, which can reduce accidents due to fatigue. It can also reduce hand injuries during airbag deployment.



Driving metro area

If you started driving before airbags were common place then the 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock position will influence the way you navigate the steering wheel. There is now a safer way to grip the wheel with the recommended position being 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock, and your thumbs placed up along the rim rather than looping around it. In the event of an accident, the force of airbag deployment can send hands at the top of the wheel into your head or even break your thumbs. Also, note never to rest your hand on the hub of the wheel or use an underhand grip while turning, as you could break your arm in the event of an accident. Since the airbag was invented, people have been breaking their wrists and arms by having them in odd positions when the airbag activates.

Points to remember

- Sit in the seat and relax. If you have adjusted the seat correctly, use it the way it has been designed.
- Make minor adjustments to your position occasionally to change the stressors on your body. Be sure to stay in a safe supported position. Change your grip on the wheel occasionally.
- Do not use the car as an office. Using the laptop in the other seat creates twisting of the spine. Bending over to fill out paperwork causes your neck to flex forward unsafely.
- Give your body a few minutes out of the car before lifting things from the boot or other storage areas.
- Always remove your wallet from your back pocket before sitting. This causes the pelvis to twist, stressing the back.
- When stuck in traffic or during a long journey, it helps to keep the body mobile. Try some simple but effective exercises, such as buttock clenches, side bends and seat braces – pushing your hands into the steering wheel and your back into the seat and shoulder shrugs, with a five second hold, as well as shoulder circles.
- Always have water available to maintain hydration and if driving for long periods, don't forget to protect yourself from the sun.



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