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# Keep Your Back IN SHAPE

## SEATING ERGONOMICS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

BY: DR. BETHANY DIXON, DC

WHETHER ENGAGED IN LONG-HAUL TRANSPORT OR LOCAL/REGIONAL DELIVERY, YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT TRUCK DRIVING IS ONE OF THE HARDEST JOBS ON BODIES. In fact, truck driving

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always ranks near the top of OSHA's list of professions that experience lost time due to injury. Next time you proclaim, "Oh, my aching back," keep in mind the cause may not be what you think.

Many factors can increase wear and tear of the spine. It's made up of vertebrae and discs. The vertebrae are the bones that enable the body to stand or

sit. The discs between the vertebrae absorb the impact of each movement, and enable the bones to glide and move. With each vibration and movement, the vertebrae are compressed, and then they move back to their original size and shape. With constant vibration, these discs arguably encounter more compression than experienced in any other job. Each pothole and each bump in the road places more and more pressure on these discs. The good news is that there are several things you can do to lessen the risk of injury.

The way you sit can play a huge role in

the amount of wear and tear transferred to your discs. If you utilize healthy ergonomics and driving techniques, you'll be able to increase the likelihood of avoiding a back issue. What is ergonomics? By definition, ergonomics is an optimal workspace that enables you to have the best work environment possible. There is a right and a wrong way to sit in your cab. There is a right and a wrong way to sleep in your cab. These habits can provide a significant difference in having a long and prosperous driving career.

### Seat Adjusting Guidelines

Keeping in mind that everyone's body dimensions and configurations are different, following are some guidelines for your consideration:

- 1. Seat Height** - Raise the seat as high as you can, but still be comfortable. The goal is to have optimal vision. You should be able to see at least three inches over the top of the steering wheel. Make sure that there is enough room between your head and the inside of the cab. Adjust your mirrors accordingly from this position.
- 2. Seat Cushion Length** - If possible adjust the seat cushion length. The optimal length is to have about 1-1/4 to 2-3/8 inches between the back of your knees and the front of the cushion. If the seat is too long you will exert pressure on the back of your knees. This and being uncomfortable can lead to improper blood circulation in the legs and feet.

- 3. Seat Position** - Move the seat forward until you can easily push the pedals through their full range with your whole foot, not just your toes.
- 4. Seat Cushion Angle** - Tilt the seat cushion until your thighs are supported along the full length of the cushion without experiencing pressure at the back of the knees.
- 5. Seat Backrest** - Adjust the backrest until it supports the full length of your back when you are sitting upright. If you are leaning too far back, you may end up bending your head and neck forward, which may cause muscle fatigue, neck or shoulder pain, tingling in the fingers, etc.



6. **Lumbar Support** - Adjust the lumbar support up and down and in and out until you feel an even pressure along your back from the hips to shoulder height. At this point, the seat back should feel comfortable, and there should be no gaps or pressure points in the back-support area.

7. **Steering Wheel** - Adjust the steering wheel for height or tilt, and pull it back for easy reach. The center of the steering wheel should be about 10 to 12 inches from your breastbone. The closer you are to the air bag, the higher the possibility of injury if the air bag deploys, even if you are wearing a seat belt. If your steering wheel can be tilted up and down, tilt it so the air bag behind the center of the steering wheel is pointing to your chest, not your head and neck or your stomach. In addition, your arms should be in a comfortable position (not too high or too low).

**8. Head Restraint (head rest)**

- While sitting, raise the head restraint until the top of it is level with the top of your head. If the head restraint can be tilted, adjust the angle of the head restraint until almost touching the back of your head when in your sitting posture.

These recommendations along with a proper stretching and exercise program can greatly reduce the likelihood of injury. If you feel as though you've had a back injury, visit your local Chiropractic physician. A chiropractor can evaluate and diagnosis what is causing the pain and help your specific problem.

**NOTE:** Article prepared with input from [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/driving.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/driving.html)



## ABOUT DR. DIXON

Dr. Dixon is a Chiropractic Physician, an FMCSA Certified Medical Examiner and a Licensed & Registered Dietitian. Her practice is devoted to helping drivers achieve their healthy-living goals by providing chiropractic services, nutritional counseling, medical orthotics and nutritional supplements. She also provides DOT required services including physicals, drug testing, breath alcohol testing, DOT consortium, and the paperwork needed for a complete DOT file. Dr. Dixon can be heard talking about DOT Physicals and other health concerns on SiriusXM 146, *Road Dog Trucking News!* For any of the provided services, please contact the Drivers Health Clinic located at TA Wildwood, Florida, I-75 at Exit 329, 352.643.1034.



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