# Make Driving With Rheumatoid Arthritis Easier

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## Coping with Driving Difficulties

Driving in itself is difficult enough with all the careless drivers out there, but people with rheumatoid arthritis have more to worry about when it comes to driving a motor vehicle. Your functional limitations make it hard to perform tasks that others behind the wheel don't think twice about, like bending to get into the vehicle or moving your shoulders and neck to look behind you to back out of a parking space. Grasping and turning the steering wheel can also be a painful experience.

It is important for everyone old enough to drive to keep that ability. It is rooted in our physical, emotional, and mental needs to be independent of relying on others to go where we want to go. If you have arthritis that causes joints to become swollen and stiff, this independence may be threatened.

### What to Do

There are things you can do to drive safer and maintain your independence:

- Get another side and/or rearview mirror. This will enable you to see into "blind spots".
- Ensure you have a vehicle that has power steering and automatic transmission.
- Find a car that has the seatbelt feature where it automatically places it across you. This will save from needing to reach over your shoulder each time to get your seatbelt on.
- Central locking and electric windows are great accessories to have on the vehicle.

If you take medicine to treat your RA, be sure that it will not make you sleepy. Arthritis can cause functional limitations, but you can maintain your movement and strength by staying active. You may want to try out glucosamine and chondroitin to help keep your joints lubricated. Your doctor or physical therapist can give you exercises that will keep your joints stronger and flexible.

There are rehabilitation centers that you can go to where a specialist can evaluate how your RA is affecting your driving. This specialist can determine ways you can improve your driving skills and suggest adaptive devices that can help your situation. These devices can be installed in your vehicle to facilitate safer driving. You will also be trained on how to use these adaptive devices before you drive on your own with them.

There will be a time when you may not be able to drive safely because of the worsening of your rheumatoid arthritis. You will then need to explore the following options:

- Taxi service
- Family or friends to give you a ride
- Walking or mobility scooter (if it isn't too far)
- Shuttle buses
- Public transit

You may have senior centers or other nonprofits that offer transportation services in your community.