

Driving and Arthritis

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Arthritis includes nearly 100 different conditions, causing pain in the joints and connective tissue throughout the body. The key factor in the most serious forms of rheumatic disease is inflammation evidenced by heat, swelling, redness, stiffness, and pain. Depending on the areas affected and functional ability, either a sedan or van may be an appropriate vehicle choice. Loss of joint mobility may result in diminished ability to reach, grasp, manipulate, and release objects. Strength, endurance, and range of motion difficulties may necessitate adaptive devices such as extra mirrors, key holders, extended gear shift levers, power windows and door locks. More extensive adaptive equipment or vehicle modifications may be needed for persons whose ability to use their arms and legs is severely affected by the disease. The following are considerations for selecting a vehicle:

Driving a sedan

When considering the use of a sedan, the individual must be able to do the following:

- Lock and unlock the door
- Open and close the door
- Transfer to and from the wheelchair if applicable
- Store and retrieve the wheelchair if indicated (either independently or with a wheelchair loading device)

Since characteristics and dimensions of vehicles vary, it is important that the individual performs these functions in the vehicle being considered prior to purchase. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide recommendations for sedan selection.



Driving a van

If an individual is unable to drive a sedan, there are several options available for driving a van. Specialized modifications can allow a person to transfer to the driver seat or to drive from the wheelchair. There are several levels of driving control technology to compensate for the loss of strength and/or range of motion. Some of these include:

- Reduced effort steering systems to compensate for reduced strength
- Servo brake and accelerator control to compensate for reduced range of motion and strength
- Joystick driving systems, allowing one-hand operation of brake, accelerator, and steering

Adaptive equipment and vehicle modifications for wheelchair access are available for some full-size vans and minivans. All vans, however, are not suitable for modifications. A driver rehabilitation specialist can assist in making the correct van choice. He/she can provide a comprehensive evaluation to determine a person's ability to drive. The assessment should include: vision, visual perception, functional ability, reaction time, and behind-the-wheel evaluation.