



CAR TRAVEL: GETTING BACK TO DRIVING INFORMATION SHEET

This information sheet contains information for people with spinal cord injury (SCI) or cauda equina syndrome (CES) who want to get back in to driving. Here you will find details about driving assessments and learning to drive. It also tells you about equipment to help you get in and out of a car (known as 'transferring') and to help put your wheelchair in/out of the car.

Check out our Access All Areas: Travel and Mobility video series on car travel and listen to our podcast series (see page 7)

You can connect with people who can share their experience and advice via your local [SIA Community Support Group](#) and [SIA Support Network Facebook Group](#).



DRIVING ASSESSMENTS

You should have a driving assessment before returning to driving. A driving assessment is not a driving test. It will look at your needs and see how you can drive safely and what adaptations may be necessary to help you do this.

Adaptations mean things like different controls for steering, braking and controlling the different parts of a car.

During the assessment you will be able to see and try out adaptations and talk about different equipment that might help. Here are some links to help you find a driving assessment near you:

- [Driving Mobility](#).
- [RDAC](#)



You can be referred by a healthcare professional for a driving assessment or self refer. You may need to pay for this assessment.

After the driving assessment you will be given a detailed report which will have some recommendations for the support and adaptations you need to drive. At the assessment you can also think about how you will get your wheelchair into and out of your car. With practice, most people can transfer into and out of a standard car on their own.



DRIVING ASSESSMENTS

WALKING WITH ASSISTANCE

If you can stand or walk then you may only need minimal adaptations to your car, like changing to an automatic car. It is still a good idea to have a driving assessment to work out what you need. If you have pain and fatigue (feeling tired a lot of or all of the time) then think about how this might affect your driving and how to manage this.

MANUAL WHEELCHAIR USER

If you use a manual wheelchair most of the time you will often need adaptations to your car. You will need to have a driving assessment to work out what you need. During the assessment you can also think about how you will get your wheelchair into and out of your car. With practice, most people can transfer into and out of a standard car on their own.

POWERED WHEELCHAIR USER

For people using a powered wheelchair, returning to driving is possible. There is likely to be a detailed assessment process. You may need to decide between driving a standard car or a WAV which allows you to drive from a power wheelchair. The assessment process can help you choose from the many vehicle adaptations that will help you to drive. If you do not want to or cannot return to driving then a passenger assessment is similar to a driving assessment but looks at the best ways for you to sit in a vehicle and be secure.

LEARNING TO DRIVE

If you did not drive before you had your injury then you can still learn to drive after it.

Find a suitable driving instructor who has the car adaptations you need.

Find a Disability Driving Instructor

If you already have a car/wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) through the Motability scheme then you can learn to drive in this car with certain conditions. You might be able to get help to pay for up to 40 hours of driving lessons through the Motability Foundation

Can I learn to drive in my vehicle and get financial help for this?

If you had a spinal cord injury (SCI) or cauda equina syndrome (CES) as a child you may be able to learn to drive from the age of 16 rather than 17.

Learn to drive a car: step by step (GOV.UK)

You can apply for your provisional licence three months before you're allowed to drive (16 or 17).

Apply online: www.gov.uk/apply-first-provisional-driving-licence



GETTING INTO AND OUT OF YOUR VEHICLE AND TRANSFERRING

WALKING WITH ASSISTANCE

If you are able to stand and step you may still be able to get into and out of car but might now need to think about seat height/position to make this easier.

WHEELCHAIR USER

You can learn to transfer into and out of your vehicle on both the driver and passenger side. To make the transfer as easy as possible it is a good idea to make sure the car seat you are transferring to is lower or at the same level as your wheelchair. Being able to change the position of your car seat automatically can help with this (some cars have 'seat position' settings so you could set one as your best driving position and one as your best transferring position). Below are two videos demonstrating ways of transferring into a car. Click on the image to play:



There is equipment to make it easier to get into and out of your vehicle such as transfer plates, swivel seats and hoists. For more information see: [Adaptations to help you get in and out](#) (Motability)

If you are considering a WAV (wheelchair adapted vehicle) then think about how you may get into the vehicle (side entrance, back tail lift or ramp) and whether you plan to remain in your wheelchair when travelling or would like to transfer out onto a seat. A 6-way driving seat is an option for transferring between a wheelchair and the passenger or driver's seat inside a WAV. It is a car seat that can move in six directions – up, down, backwards, forwards, rotating left and rotating right.

STORING YOUR WHEELCHAIR

Once you have got into your vehicle you will need to think about how you store your wheelchair or other mobility aids. Some people can learn to lift their own wheelchair into and out of the car. This means they can travel independently.

This video shows someone lifting their wheelchair independently into and out of their car:

Wheelchair skills: How to get into a car as a wheelchair user (BackUp)

If you are not able to do this and are not planning to travel in your wheelchair there are options for equipment to help you with this. Examples of this equipment could be roof top box or a car boot hoist. The Motability website has information and useful videos to demonstrate these:

Adaptations to help you store equipment (Motability)

There is a risk of damaging shoulder joints from picking up a wheelchair on a daily basis. Using this equipment can reduce this risk.

WALKING WITH ASSISTANCE

Think about whether you would be able to store your wheelchair in the boot comfortably on your own and walk around the car. Do you need equipment to help you with this?

MANUAL WHEELCHAIR USER

Many people who use a manual wheelchair can learn to lift their wheelchair into and out of their car on their own. Do you need help or equipment to do this?

Remember, not all makes and models of vehicles can be fitted with all adaptations/equipment so you will need to check this.

VIDEO LINKS

Check out our Access All Areas: Travel and mobility video series which has three videos featuring drivers with spinal cord injury and cauda equina syndrome.

John uses a manual wheelchair, Ian uses a powerchair and Joe who walks a little and also uses a manual wheelchair.

Please click on the images below to play these videos:



For more information, visit our [Travel Hub](#) or contact us at:

Spinal Injuries Association, SIA House, 2 Trueman Place, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes, MK6 2HH

e: travel@spinal.co.uk t: 0800 980 0501 (freephone support line: Monday - Friday 10.00am-4.00pm)