

C onsiderations when Buying a Car

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DEPARTMENT

Steering

- look for a thick steering wheel grip
- does the steering wheel tilt easily? (tilting it up can simplify getting in and out)
- controls for wipers, turn signals, high beams in the steering column reduce reaching
- automatic or power steering (transmission and brakes) requires less effort
- specialized steering wheel adaptations and hand controls for foot pedals are available ; driving assessments are available to determine your needs
- cruise control makes highway driving easier

Seating

- Height of seat:
 - consider the height of the seat relative to the ground ie. must you stoop low to get into a sports car, or climb too high to get into a truck?
 - if you use a wheelchair, the height of the car seat must be similar to the height of your wheelchair seat
- look for as many power operated controls which allow you to vary seat position ie. adjustability forward/back, up/down, and adjustable lumbar support
- swivel seats make getting in and out easier
- head rest should be adjustable and in contact with the back of your head, not neck
- some models have hydraulic seats to increase shock absorption, and can raise and lower
- bucket seats: may be more difficult to get in and out.
 - it may be difficult to put in a raised cushion.
- car seats with slippery surface (leather, vinyl, cover made of slippery fabric) are easier to move on and off

Doors

- 4 doors are smaller, lighter and easier to use than 2 door cars
- make sure doors open and close with minimal effort (especially van doors)
- consider the type of door handle:
 - is your wrist in a neutral position when using it?
 - is there too much pressure on the thumb when opening door?
 - a vertical pull handle puts less strain on your hand and arm
- electric windows and mirror adjustors reduce strain on hands and arms
- electronic touchpads in place of a key can be easier

Trunk

- check trunk handle for ease of use; remote openers can pop trunk open for you
- deep trunks are more difficult than some station wagon, van or hatchback trunks.
- hydraulic hatchbacks reduce amount of energy needed when lifting the hatch door, and your non hydraulic system can be replaced with one

Mirrors

- learn to use rearview and sideview mirrors so that you reduce the blind spot and minimize neck strain
- proper use of trailer mirrors can eliminate blind spots all together
- wide angle rearview mirrors can allow you to look at passengers in back seat without turning your head

Emergency Brake

- test how easy it is to engage and release the handbrake
- a lever underneath the handbrake requiring gripping action is less strain on the hand than a brake with a button on the end

Ignition

- ignitions which require the pushing of a button to release the key are more difficult
- placement of the keyhole can be awkward on some cars, try it out
- large keys are easier to grasp and turn

What about my old car?

- enlarge the steering wheel grip with a cover ie. foam, leather or sheepskin cover.
- auto upholstery shops can modify your car. You can have seats tilted or raised: tracks can be extended to give more leg room so it is easier to get in and out: seatbelts can be modified for easier positioning and buckling: grab handles can be installed to keep your balance while getting in and out
- seat covers of slippery materials can help you get in or out
- a raised cushion can help transferring in and out
- a wedge shaped cushion can improve comfort
- door hinges can be changed so the door can swing out wider
- "step up" boards can be installed to reduce step height into a truck or van
- raise the trunk height with plywood and blocks
- door handle openers can be obtained for older style door handles

Resources

- Tommy's Auto Upholstery and Accessories 383-8941
- Styles Auto Upholstery 384-5442
- Assistive devices for cars Check medical supply stores
- Saferway driving school
to learn to use trailer mirrors or other adaptations 385-8212
- Driving assessment unit - Vancouver
Driver Rehab Centre (604) 322-8335
- Victoria (Gorge Hospital) 995-4700
- Major car companies have programmes for assisting physically challenged
eg. *Chrysler Physically Challenged Assistance Program* 1-800-256-6908 or see your dealer
They can help finance car modifications if you are eligible, and/or lead you to local car conversion companies