

Adapting Cars, Vans or Trucks for Drivers with OI

Drivers who have OI and their families often need to add special equipment to their cars, vans or trucks to make it possible to drive comfortably and safely. This can make an already expensive purchase even more costly. A number of resources are available to help drivers be wise consumers.

Finances

Depending on individual needs, adding adaptive equipment to a motor vehicle can cost anywhere from a few hundred dollars to many thousands of dollars. In your financial plan, include vehicle purchase price, cost of adaptive equipment and insurance.

- Investigate government financial aid programs
 - State Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation may pay for some equipment.
 - Some states waive sales tax for adaptive devices with a doctor's prescription.
 - Some costs may be tax deductible; consult a qualified tax preparer.
- Investigate car manufacturer rebate programs. They pay part of the cost of adaptive devices on new vehicles. Consult local car dealers, the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) website, or a driver rehabilitation specialist for rebate information.
- Consider a previously owned adapted vehicle.

Evaluate Driver Needs

Determine what is needed from the vehicle by considering:

- The kind of driving you will be doing,
- The size of available parking at home and work,
- The amount of space added equipment will take up inside the vehicle,
- Needed cargo space for passengers, service dogs and/or stowing a wheelchair or scooter.

Determine which types of adaptive equipment are needed.

First time drivers and anyone whose needs have changed are advised to have a professional evaluation.

- A certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist works with drivers who have physical challenges to evaluate strengths/weaknesses, identify appropriate types of adaptive equipment and recommend suitable vehicles.
- The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists, The American Occupational Therapy Association, state departments of Vocational Rehabilitation and your state Department of Motor Vehicles are reliable sources of information for locating a qualified evaluator.
- Request a report containing a complete list of recommended modifications.

Determine if an air bag on/off switch is needed.

Air bags are a concern for many drivers who have OI. The newer models which release less forcefully are less of a problem for adults than older models. Ten inches between the driver's breastbone and the steering wheel (where the air bag is stored) is recommended. Detailed information on air bags and on/off switch applications is available from State Motor Vehicle Departments, AAA clubs and the NHTSA. After an application is approved, the NHTSA provides the vehicle owner with a list of technicians who are authorized to install the switch.

Make Vehicle and Equipment Selections

- The report prepared by the driver rehabilitation specialist will include vehicle suggestions. Drivers who have OI are not necessarily limited to owning vans.
- Manufacturer web sites and on-line consumer discussion groups provide additional information about devices and particular kinds of cars, vans or trucks.
- Many kinds of adaptive equipment are used by drivers with OI including but not limited to pedal extenders, seats that swivel, six point transfer seats, hand controls, ramps, seat belt adjusters, wheelchair tie downs and lifts for wheelchairs.
- Before purchasing a device investigate whether it will be covered by a warranty.

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- Some vehicle adaptations are not covered by new car warranties, change the warranty or require additional vehicle insurance.
- With the help of the driver rehabilitation specialist, test equipment and vehicles before making a purchase. In most cases drivers should be able to enter and exit the vehicle independently.
- Drivers who have OI also recommend:
 - Subscribing to an emergency service
 - Installing GPS

Working with a reputable adaptive equipment installer is important because car dealers do not normally do installations -- even on new vehicles. Training, experience, warranty and service practices are factors to consider. References can come from friends, the car dealer, the driver evaluator, and the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association. QAP-Certified installers have met the NMEDA quality assurance program standards.

Get Training

The same places that offer driver evaluation usually offer driver training programs. Many states require proof of hands-on training before issuing license tags for the newly adapted vehicle. Check with your state motor vehicle department. Equipment installers should also include information about maintenance. A well maintained vehicle is safer and lasts longer.

Happy motoring!

Resources

American Occupational Therapy Association
www.ota.org

Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists
www.aded.net

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
www.nhtsa.gov (Under "Driving Safety" tab, select Disabled Drivers)

National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA)
www.nmeda.org

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