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## Advice for Seniors Purchasing a Vehicle

### Types of Vehicles

The size of the car is a personal choice. Some seniors feel safer in a heavier vehicle while others find smaller cars easier to handle. Generally, vehicles can be split into three categories, two-door, four-door, and mini-vans/Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs). Below are several features from each, which may influence your vehicle choice.

#### Two-door

- Two-door vehicles provide the user with a wider doorframe. This wider frame may make it easier to enter or exit the vehicle and to transfer such mobility devices as a walker or wheelchair. The wider doorframe also allows access to the rear seats when the door is opened.

#### Four-door

- Four-door vehicles' separate doors allow more access to the rear seats than one finds in a two-door car.
- If you anticipate that an older adult will need to sit in the back seat, be sure to check that they can get in and out of it easily.

#### Mini Vans / SUVs

- The main advantage to mini vans and SUVs is the increased seat height. These vehicles typically have higher seats than two- or four-door vehicles. The increased seat height in a minivan or SUV may allow you to slide in and out of your seat as opposed to 'dropping' into or 'climbing' out of your seat in a two or four-door vehicle.
- Mini vans also have one or two large sliding doors that provide access to the rear seats. These doors provide large openings that may make it easier for someone to assist a person when entering or exiting a vehicle.
- Check to determine if you are able to close the rear doors of a mini van or SUV as some of these are quite heavy. A power-operated rear door can be a useful option.



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### Getting In and Out of A Car

#### Doors

- *Size & Weight:* Are they hard to close? Do you have to reach too far or pull too hard to close the door?
- *Width:* Look for a width that allows you to get in and out easily, but is not too awkward to close.
- *Height:* If too low, you may bump your head.
- *Sills:* If there is a lip, it may cause you to trip.

#### Vehicle Height

- You may bump your head when getting in or out of the car if the overall height of the vehicle is too low.

#### Seat Height

- Lower seats can cause you to strain yourself. You may have to exert yourself to get up and out of the seat. You may also strain yourself trying to prevent “dropping” into the seat. A seat height that is too high may require you to pull yourself up to enter the car.

#### Seatbelts

- The biggest complaint with seatbelts is the difficulty with the coupling unit to allow older adults to buckle up without help. Look for a seatbelt design where the coupling unit is easy to reach, see and fasten/unfasten.
- Also look for a seatbelt that has height adjustment so it will rest comfortably on your shoulder.



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#### Seat Adjustment Methods

- If the seats are adjusted manually, they may be difficult to use. Power adjustments are preferred so you can adjust the seat height and distance from the steering wheel and/or dash board for comfort and good visibility.
- Be sure that you sit at a proper distance from the steering wheel. You should be no closer than 25 centimeters from your breast bone to the middle of the steering wheel.
- If your legs are too short to allow you to reach the gas or brake pedal comfortably, pedal extensions are available. Ask your car dealer about these extensions.
- Back or seat cushions may be used to improve your comfort or help you be better positioned. These cushions should be purchased from a home health care centre. Make sure these cushions do not interfere with the function of the seat belt.

#### Interior Space

- Check to see that there is sufficient room between the seat and the dashboard or steering wheel so that you can get in and out of the car easily.

#### Interior Lighting

- Look for a car that will turn the lights on when unlocked remotely.



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### Driving

#### Window Size

- The larger the window, the better the view you will have.
- When seated in the driver's seat, make sure that you can easily see out of the side windows when you look over your shoulder to check for other vehicles, pedestrians or obstacles. Make sure that you can clearly see through the windows when using the rearview and side mirrors.

#### Braking Systems

- ABS is a braking system that prevents the wheels from locking during braking. This allows the driver to maintain steering control while braking and lowers the braking distance in most situations. The system monitors the speed of each wheel and transfers brake power to each wheel as needed.
- If there is a problem with the system, a warning light on the dashboard will turn on to let the driver know the system is not functioning.

#### Electronic Stability Control

- Electronic Stability Control detects and prevents skids. It detects a loss of steering control and applies the brakes to the required wheels in order to help control the direction of the vehicle. In addition to applying the brakes some models may reduce engine power to help control the skid.
- When the system is engaged a warning light will appear on the dashboard to inform the driver.

#### Visors

- Check both the length and the adjustment available to minimize glare.
- Visor extensions are available. Before you use them, make sure they are securely installed and do not interfere with your ability to see through the windshield.



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### Driving

#### Airbags

- Many different styles of airbags are available. Most vehicles have airbags for occupants of the front seat.
- Many newer vehicles have side curtain airbags that protect vehicle occupants in a side impact crash.
- Newer versions of airbags are able to detect the weight of the vehicle occupant thus reducing the force with which the airbag is discharged, limiting injuries to the occupant caused by the airbag.
- The airbags of your vehicle should be at least 25 centimeters away from your chest. If you must sit closer than 25 centimeters your airbags should be equipped with a shut off system.

#### Windshield Wipers

- Look for heavy duty ones that will remove snow and ice and keep as much of the windshield cleared as possible.
- If you are purchasing a used vehicle, make sure that the windshield wipers function properly and clear the windshield effectively.

#### Reinforced Vehicle Frames

- These will prevent or decrease the amount of harm or injury in an accident. Ask the sales person how the vehicle frame is reinforced.

#### Easy-to-read Instrument Panel Display

- Look for an instrument panel that you can read and that doesn't have too much information.
- Read the information on the instrument panel both during the day and at night.



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## Advice for Seniors Purchasing a Vehicle

### Loading or Transporting Items Like Groceries

#### Automated Release Mechanisms

- These increase security and lower the need for manual dexterity to open and lock doors and trunks, especially when carrying parcels.

#### Trunk Depth and Height

- The proper trunk depth and height can help prevent back and shoulder strain when lifting items into and out of the trunk.
- Check to see that you don't have to bend over to use the trunk or that you don't need to reach too far forward.

#### Vehicle Design

- Some vehicles tend to slope upwards or downwards at the back end.
- When you test drive a car, check whether you can see clearly out the rear and back windows before you start the vehicle.
- Be sure to back the car up during your test drive; this includes parking or other backing up maneuvers to determine that you have a clear view of the back and sides of your vehicle.

#### Lock-down Features

- It is important that items being carried in your vehicle are securely fastened when the vehicle is in motion. These items could cause injury if they are not secure during a crash.
- A net or other device in the trunk prevents items from scattering during transport.



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