

CARFIT

Helping Mature Drivers Find Their Safest Fit

CarFit

CarFit is an educational program that provides a quick, yet comprehensive review of how well you and your vehicle work together. The programme also provides information and materials on community-specific resources that could enhance your driving safety and increase mobility.

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) in partnership with Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) have worked together to bring CarFit to Canada. The program was initially developed by American Automobile Association (AAA), AARP and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

Recognizing the Need

Older adults represent the fastest growing portion of the driving population, with roughly 2.7 million drivers over the age of 65 on Canadians roads today. Driving today is more difficult than ever, because of increased traffic congestion, longer commute distances, new technology and faster speeds. Research suggests that older drivers are among the safest drivers, because they are more likely to wear seat belts and less likely to speed or drink and drive. However, as people age, they're more likely to suffer serious injuries or risk death in crashes, due to greater fragility. Personal mobility is critical for healthy aging, but ill-fitting vehicles can make it uncomfortable and unsafe to drive. Today's vehicles have many safety features that offer enhanced restraints and protection, yet many drivers are unaware of those features or how to best use them. CarFit helps you better understand them and develop strategies to achieve the safest fit.

Does Your Vehicle Fit?

Do you have a clear view out your vehicle's windows? Can you reach and manage all controls and adjust the seat and seat belt so they are secure yet comfortable? Making adjustments can help you benefit from vehicle safety features by improving comfort, control and confidence behind the wheel.

What Can You Do?

Find out how the fit of your vehicle affects your driving and adjust your vehicle to your changing needs. Doing this could make a lifesaving difference. Take advantage of a CarFit check to see how well you and your vehicle work together. A trained CarFit Technician will ask you several simple questions and complete a 12-point checklist. The entire process takes about 20 minutes, and you leave with recommended car adjustments and adaptations, a list of local resources in your area and greater peace of mind. Please note, CarFit checks are not available in all areas.

We Change as We Age

As we age, changes in vision, flexibility, strength, range of motion and height may make us less comfortable and reduce our control behind the wheel.

Sharing a Drive to Protect Motorists

CAOT has taken driver safety as a key priority and invests in the implementation of innovative projects like the CarFit program. Such a program aims to reduce injury and so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations of life.

Contact your local CAA club, or an occupational therapy practitioner, or visit www.car-fit.org, for more information on how to maintain and strengthen your driving health.

CarFit was developed by American Automobile Association, American ARP and the American Occupational Therapy Association to improve driver safety and comfort behind the wheel.



Older drivers may need to find ways to cope with physical changes that include:

- Reduced strength and physical endurance.
- Stiff neck, limited head rotation or pain.
- Visual impairments, including problems with depth perception, high- and low-contrast vision, night vision and delayed recovery from glare.
- Effects of medications.
- Reduced overall range of motion and flexibility.

Increasing exercise, improving nutrition and making sure you get regular eye exams and medical checkups may help. In addition, automakers are designing vehicles geared to the needs of older drivers. These newer models provide features such as more precise seating adjustments, clearer dashboard displays, wider doors, easier seat controls, night vision technology and adjustable gas and brake pedals.

Am I comfortable and in control behind the wheel?

Checking to see that you and your vehicle fit well together can be as important to your safety as a mechanical checkup. A good fit means you have:

- **A clear line of sight over the steering wheel.** Your line of sight should be at least three inches above the top of the steering wheel.
- **Plenty of room between your breastbone and the air bag in the steering wheel.** The distance should be at least 10 inches to allow adequate room for the air bag to safely deploy. In an emergency, the bag quickly fills with air and expands toward your chest like a large balloon. The device will deploy and start to deflate in less than to the blink of an eye. It only stays inflated for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second and provides a cushion as it deflates.
- **Easy access to gas and brake pedals.** You should be able to easily reach the vehicle's pedals without having to stretch, and you should be able to completely depress the brake pedal. If a driver is straining to reach the pedals, it can be tiring and cause leg muscle fatigue. You also should be able to move your foot easily from the gas to the brake pedal.
- **A properly adjusted head restraint.** In the event of a crash, especially a rear-end collision, this can help prevent neck injuries like whiplash. When adjusting the head restraint, you may want to ask a friend to help you grasp the restraint and pull it up. The center of the restraint should be about three inches or less from the center of the back of your head, not against your neck. If it is too low, you could over-extend your neck and fail to properly support your head. Likewise, if the device is too high, it may not provide the proper support.

A seat that fits you comfortably and safely. Each time you drive, you should be able to adjust the seat for good visibility and easy access to vehicle controls.

- **A seat belt that holds you in the proper position and remains comfortable as you drive.** The proper way for an adult to wear a seat belt is for the lap belt to fit low and tight across the hips and pelvis, not on the stomach area that contains soft tissue. The shoulder belt should come over the collar bone, away from the neck, and cross over the breastbone, fitting snugly across the chest. The shoulder belt should never be behind the back or under the arm.
- **You also should be able to:**
 - Reach the shoulder belt and buckle and unbuckle the seat belt without difficulty.
 - Get into and out of your vehicle easily.
 - Turn your head to look over your shoulder when changing lanes and backing up. Many collisions related to lane-changing are the result of the driver's inability to check the vehicle's blind spots adequately.
 - Sit comfortably, without knee, back, hip, neck or shoulder stiffness or pain.

Physical changes, such as arthritis and decreased range of motion, can make vehicle safety especially challenging for older drivers. That's why CarFit is committed to educating older drivers on how they can adjust and interact with their vehicles in ways that optimize comfort and safety.