

Factsheet 14

Driving with Turner Syndrome

TURNER SYNDROME



SUPPORT SOCIETY [UK]



Driving is an increasingly important activity in modern society, giving women with Turner Syndrome (TS) independence and assisting employment opportunities. Many employers insist that a prospective employee is in the possession of a full driving licence even if the job does not involve driving as part of their daily duties. Some women with TS may lack confidence and driving may improve their self-confidence and open up opportunities.

It is known that a proportion of women with TS can find learning to drive a challenge for a number of reasons. This could be short stature, a lack of spatial awareness or poor concentration however, these can be overcome with some extra practice and an understanding of how these factors can impact on driving.



Areas for consideration:

Shorter stature - often girls, even with growth hormone treatment, can be shorter than their peers. Modern vehicles often have an adjustable driving seat, which normally can be altered for height (ideally the drivers eyes should be at a level in the centre of windscreen). If a wedge cushion is required it should be securely attached and set to avoid disappearing into the footwell in an emergency stop. Pedal extenders can be added to many cars if required.



Seating position - the back of the knee should not be too close to front edge as this can often cause discomfort reducing concentration whilst driving. There should be at least a two finger gap between the back of the knee and edge of the seat.

Adjustable steering wheel - often if someone is of shorter stature with the driver's seat adjusted for height the steering wheel may mask the instrument panel. Most modern vehicles have adjustable steering wheels which should help. Due to needing to move the seat forward to enable the foot controls to be reached comfortably the driver can often be too close to the steering wheel. It is recommended that the driver should be at least 25 cm. (10 inches) from the steering wheel, from the breastbone to the centre of the wheel.

Manual vs. automatic transmission -

most people wish to learn to drive in a car with manual transmission as this would give them a greater choice of vehicles when they have passed the driving test. It is possible for women with TS to drive a car with a manual gearbox however due to the extra demands some girls may find this challenging.

Spatial awareness, memory and concentration –

women with TS may have poor spatial awareness, short term memory and concentration sometimes described as Non-Verbal Learning Disorder. A lack of spatial awareness can lead to reduced executive functioning and attention. In practice, this can induce problems with the sequence involved in changing gear or use of the gears when concentrating on hazards such as approaching junctions. If no improvement is seen after 10-15 driving lessons it may be worthwhile considering driving a car with automatic transmission. Many women with TS find this an appropriate route to pursue and an automatic gearbox may be beneficial.

The right driving instructor – when learning to drive it is important to find a driving instructor that ideally has experience of teaching pupils with disabilities. It is unlikely however they would have previously taught someone with TS. Visit the following websites for information on obtaining instructors:

www.disabilityinstructors.com

www.disableddrivinglessons.co.uk

www.drivingmobility.org.uk

The Practical Test – You may be entitled to extra time for this test. If you had extra time at school the same applies for the practical test. It may be useful to give more details of theory and practical if extra time is required. A good overview is given at www.disabilitydrivinginstructors.com/driving-advice/first-time-drivers/special-needs-and-the-practical-driving-test/ and <https://www.disabilitydrivinginstructors.com/driving-advice/first-time-drivers/special-needs-and-the-theory-test/>

“Finding the right instructor is first, you can get female only driving schools or instructors who specialise in nervous drivers or drivers with obstacles. Secondly, if manual really doesn't work out, try automatic before giving up. Thirdly, and most importantly it may (but may not) be a marathon journey so allow for that – don't pressure yourself with how long it should take – and just focus on making progress at your own pace. Fourthly, don't hang around for the 'better or more perfect time' to do it – just do it now, feel the fear and do it anyway. Fifthly, it is worth all of it for the benefits and changes to your life. Be inspired and good luck! Xx” Lisa



“Make sure you learn in a car that is right for you, as some cars for me just weren't suitable in terms of seat height adjustment etc! Also persevere, don't give up 'cos it took me 9 tests to pass and I'm really glad I kept going!”

Rachael



It is important that the pupil informs the instructor of

the problems they may have in learning a new subject, so that they can work together as a team to enable the pupil to pass both theory and practical driving tests.

Some useful websites

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency

www.mobilitysolutions.co.uk

www.safedrivingforlife.info

Driving tips from parents and women with TS:

- Use a disabled aware instructor, ideally someone who has taught someone with Autism or Asperger's, as they will be able to understand the need to be black and white and not infer an instruction. Do research instructors and discuss your needs with them.
- BSM have a driving simulator which may be of help.
- *"My personal recommendation is learning in an automatic. My daughter was adamant she would learn in a manual. But she kept failing and it took me years to persuade her that driving an automatic gave her more time to focus on what is happening around about her. She passed first time in the automatic after 13 fails. I am so proud of her determination to succeed. Driving has given her a lot of independence and job opportunities."*
- Lots of repetition until a skill is mastered, lots of patience and encouragement. It may take longer but they usually get there in the end.
- Many of our members do drive in both manuals and automatics, so it is possible.

Find the right driving instructor, I changed mine and was happy with the second one. I would also say practice, practice, practice. My poor parents were worn out teaching me and my twin sister at the same time, but I needed a lot more practice than her so they took me out. I passed only 2 months after her on my second test, because I was on the road loads of times." Liz

Recommended reading on TSSS website www.tss.org.uk: Spatial Awareness – Factsheet 5 Education booklet "How to Help your Child Thrive and Succeed at School"

"Clinical Practice - Guidelines for the Care of Girls and Women with Turner Syndrome"

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**Further information about Turner Syndrome can be obtained from: Arlene Smyth - Executive Officer
Turner Syndrome Support Society (TSSS)**

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