

# Driving and Spina Bifida

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Driving and Spina Bifida ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists Spina bifida is a congenital defect in which part of one or more vertebrae (the bone structure that surrounds the spinal column) fail to develop completely, leaving part of the spinal cord exposed. It can occur anywhere on the spine but is most common in the lower back. The severity of the condition depends on how much nerve tissue is exposed. Frequently special adaptations on a vehicle are necessary for independent driving. The person with spina bifida may also have impairments in the areas of vision, perception (how the brain interprets what the eyes see), or learning. Adaptive driving equipment is frequently used for physical problems. A spinner knob and hand controls can be used if a person is unable to use either foot for gas or brake. Specialized modifications can also allow a person to transfer to the driver’s seat or drive from the wheelchair in a van or minivan.

Common factors that can affect safe driving:

- Limited range of motion and strength
- Difficulty with coordinated movements
- Visual impairments
- Trouble scanning or tracking quickly
- Learning difficulties
- Impaired judgment in complex situations
- Slow processing and reaction time



A driver rehabilitation evaluation will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each individual as related to the driving task. The goal is independent, safe driving. No modifications or vehicle selection should be made until the person has completed a driver evaluation.

The assessment should include:

- Vision
- Perception
- Coordination
- Functional ability
- Behind-the-wheel evaluation

If you or someone you know is having difficulty, a driver evaluation may be indicated. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide a comprehensive evaluation to determine one’s ability to drive.

