CarFit Occupational Therapy Training: Gadgets and Talking Points

Purpose:
The occupational therapy practitioner can demonstrate a sampling of “gadgets” that may enhance driver safety. (Gadgets demonstrated at CarFit are used in a non-moving vehicle only, such as seat positioning or to aide ingress/egress. Devises demonstrated at CarFit do not require any form of prescription or medical recommendation)

The occupational therapy practitioner (or occupational therapy student) will:
1. highlight and explain device features that are of interest to driver or passenger
2. be aware of basic precautions/concerns/limitations of these basic devices
3. bring knowledge of medical conditions and changes associated with aging to the CarFit event. It is this knowledge base that creates the foundation for discussing basic gadgets and compensatory strategies. Advanced knowledge of a driving rehabilitation specialist is not required at the CarFit event. If further consultation or expertise is required, suggest the driver seek additional information from the appropriate specialist or medical provider.

Suggested list of gadgets to include in the “CarFit Kit”**:
1. Handybar (transfers, driver or passengers)
2. Ribbon or seatbelt Easy Reach Handle (reach the seatbelt)
3. Wedge cushion (seat height)
4. Button, SmartView, or panoramic mirrors (reduced flexibility for scanning and mirror checks))
5. Garbage bag, silky scarf or seat slide (transfers)
6. Leg lifter (bringing weaker leg safely into vehicle, transfers)
7. Key holder (decrease pain/trauma when turning key)
8. Other – preference of occupational therapist, occupational therapy assistant or driving rehabilitation specialist participating in your CarFit Event. (Review all pros and cons, precautions associated with devices).

*Resources listed at end of this document are for ease in ordering and are not intended to endorse any specific brand or vendor.

The occupational therapy practitioner or Driving Rehab Specialist addresses items checked for further discussion. Remember- the goal of CarFit is to provide EDUCATION ONLY. This is NOT a forum to offer an individualized therapy session or specialized intervention.

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Educate, personalize ideas for the individual, and advise ONLY

1. Important: Do not associate the CarFit event with any Product or Brand. We educate about device features and functions, not products. (Individual organizations could create a local resource list. CarFit cannot endorse any particular products).

2. The goal at CarFit is to enhance driver safety. If you identify risk, encourage follow up with the appropriate care provider (consider consulting your physician, scheduling a vision check, scheduling a comprehensive driving evaluation, etc.)

3. Check-out responsibilities depend on your professional judgment. Each gadget offers a possible solution. You determine appropriate tools to demonstrate for an individual driver.

Talking Points: “Everyday Gadgets” That May Assist Mobility or Decrease Risk

A. Handybar (transfers, driver or passengers)

1. Functions much like the arm on an armchair
2. Can be helpful for drivers or for passengers (educate as assist to ingress or egress from the vehicle).
3. **Precautions/concerns/limitation:**
   a. The “blade” style may be too wide to fit in some vehicle models.
   b. The device cannot be left in place; therefore it requires a convenient and secure location for safe storage.

B. Ribbon or seatbelt Easy Reach Handle (reach the seatbelt)

1. When rotating and reaching for the seatbelt is painful, difficult or impossible.
2. A piece of ribbon may be sufficient or a gadget such as the “easy reach” device that attaches to the seatbelt.
3. **Precautions/concerns/limitations:**
   a. Must not interfere with the seatbelt in any manner. The seatbelt must freely retract and feed.

C. Wedge cushion (seat height, check impact on reach to pedals)

1. Discuss quality of foam (firm, stable). Wedge provides a more stable surface than pillows. (Quality of foam is one reason for higher prices. Dense foam is preferred)
2. Benefit of the shape, wedge or block style cushion, will depend on the person’s needs and the contours of the vehicle seat.
3. **Precautions/concerns/limitations:**
   a. Any cushion may impact the ability to reach the pedals.
   b. Consider pros and cons – non-slip surface for stability vs. slippery surface to facilitate sliding into place.
   c. Ensure it does not interfere with the seatbelt.
   d. Explain the risk of “submarining” under the lap belt in the event of a crash. Emphasize the importance of a snugly warn lapbelt.

D. Mirrors (adjustment, additional side and rearview (panoramic)

1. Mirror adjustment education is offered as a part of CarFit education.
2. Add on mirrors are a possibility if optimally adjusted mirrors remain inadequate. (Such as a panoramic rearview mirror or extended side view mirrors).
   a. The Smart View Mirrors are excellent but require special training (Phone: 203-272-9391)
   b. The “button mirrors” available at carwashes and discount stores are inexpensive but some feel they are quite small and may distort.

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3. Newer vehicle models offer more adjustment and sophisticated features such as tipping down to better see the road behind when the vehicle is placed in reverse.

4. **Precautions/concerns/limitations:**
   a. Concern that interior Panoramic Rearview Mirrors are not crash-tested and may break off and become a dangerous projectile in the event of a crash. At minimum emphasize importance of secure installation according to manufacturer instructions.
   b. Concern that “add on” mirrors may be challenging to use and may distort.

**E. Plastic garbage bag or seat slide (transfers)**
1. Plastic garbage bag is an inexpensive assist to sliding into place. (Commercially available products such as the seat slide are also available for purchase).
2. This can be a useful as a caregiver resource.
3. **Precautions/concerns/limitations:**
   a. Once in the seat the bag creates a slippery surface. Recommend that it be removed when vehicle is in motion.

**F. Leg lifter (transfers, pivot into the seat)**
1. A loop is placed over foot to assist in “lifting leg” into the vehicle.
2. Manually show how to assist pulling leg into vehicle by using the pant leg or reaching under and lifting the thigh.

**G. Key holder (decrease pain/trauma with turning key)**
1. Generally inexpensive and available in various styles and designs.
2. **Precautions/concerns/limitations:**
   a. Consider placement of ignition and be sure the Keyholder does not interfere

### Suggestions for Setting Up Your CarFit Kit

1. Some occupational therapy practitioners or students simply create a Resource Notebook with photos or brochures describing varies gadgets. Make copies of brochures or websites to include as a handout.
   a. Create a LOCAL EVENT resource handout with suggested retailers or instructions for obtaining a variety of gadgets and devices. This list should not imply endorsement by CarFit of any one brand or vendor.

2. It is preferred to offer a sampling of gadgets for CarFit participants to look at and try.

3. Some event organizers request funding to purchase a sampling of gadgets to make available for demonstration as their “CarFit OT Gadget Kit”

4. The following list represents a sampling of websites where several items are available. Prices and styles can and will vary. (Searching on Google, Yahoo, etc by gadget names will offer several options for purchase. This handout offers one website for your convenience.)

5. **Caution for driving rehabilitation specialists.** Be strategic if you choose to offer an optional display of specialized equipment (hand controls, spinner knob, left foot accelerator or pedal blocks, for example). Any display of adaptive equipment that requires a driving evaluation and prescription should be displayed in a distinct area clearly distinguishing adaptive equipment from everyday “gadgets.” A display of specialized adaptive equipment is not required at a CarFit event.

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Resources

1. Handybar (transfers, driver or passengers)
   - [http://www.handybar.com/](http://www.handybar.com/) around $40

2. Ribbon or seatbelt Easy Reach Handle (reach the seatbelt)
   - [http://www.shop.com/op/~Easy Reach Seatbelt-prod-12550917](http://www.shop.com/op/~Easy Reach Seatbelt-prod-12550917) around $8.00

3. Wedge cushion (seat height)
   - Purchase at Bed, Bath and Beyond for under $20
   - Other foam qualities and styles may be $50 to $100

4. Mirrors (instructions re: “how to adjust” is adequate)
   - Use your professional judgment if choosing to have sample mirrors. Some are concerned that interior mirrors could break loose in a crash. Training is essential to benefit from ancillary mirrors.

5. Garbage bag or seat slide (transfers)
   - [http://www.abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=19327&top=13902&productid=78954&trail=0](http://www.abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=19327&top=13902&productid=78954&trail=0)
   - Seat Slide approximately $100.00
   - garbage bag or silky scarf (nominal)

6. Leg lifter (transfers)
   - [http://www.dynamic-living.com/leg-lifter.htm](http://www.dynamic-living.com/leg-lifter.htm) (under $15.00)

7. Adjustable (built up) Key holder (decrease pain/trauma with turning key)
   - Several style choices (prices range $8.00 to $15.00) available at [http://www.sammonspreston.com/Supply/Product.asp?Leaf_Id=6513](http://www.sammonspreston.com/Supply/Product.asp?Leaf_Id=6513)

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Assists leg into/out of vehicle (Leg Lifter)

Reduces joint stress when turning (Key Holder)

Reduces turning or trunk rotation to reach seatbelt (Easy Reach Seat Belt)

Assists gas cap removal and tightening (Gas Cap Wrench)

Assists driver or passenger in and out of vehicle (HandyBar)

Adds seat height. Styles vary in shape and firmness. (Wedge Seat)

Increases driver side road view (SmartView Mirror)

Increases rear road view. (Panoramic Rearview Mirror)

Caution:
- Devices may come with some risk. Understand the Pros & Cons before purchase!
- Install according to instructions and carefully review precautions.

For information on an extensive array of equipment and vehicle modification options with guidance on equipment selection and installation specific to your needs and vehicle model, consult an occupational therapy driving rehabilitation specialist www.aota.org/older-driver or NMEDA (www.nmeda.org)

Tip to improve driving safety: keep your windows, headlights, tail-lights, mirrors & glasses clean!

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