



A Union of Professionals

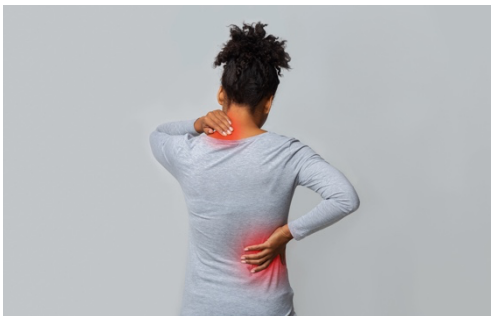
WORK SHOULDN'T HURT

Tips for Adjunct Road Warriors

If you are one of the more than 1 million people who are now working as contingent faculty at U.S. institutions of higher education, you are probably driving from campus to campus stitching together your career.

According to a 2014 study,¹ of the adjunct instructors who gave information about the number of schools they served, “48 percent taught at two institutions, 27 percent taught at three, and 13 percent taught at four or more.” Most respondents identified themselves as “freeway flyers,” with one saying: “My commute at the highest point was 900 miles per week; at the lowest it was only 550 miles per week.”

As many adjuncts know, sitting in a car for extended periods of time places strain on your back and decreases circulation, which can result in pain and discomfort.



Driving Ergonomics

What can drivers do to ensure they’re sitting comfortably? Here are a few tips:

- Adjust your seat as close to the steering wheel as is comfortable so that your knees and elbows are bent, and so that you can easily operate the steering wheel

and pedals without reaching. Your hips should be slightly open but leaning too far back is not safe.

- Your hands should be at the 9:00/3:00 position and below shoulder height, and your arms should be less than fully extended. (If you are shorter than 5'4" and your car has a driver-side airbag, always maintain a 10-inch distance from the source of deployment.)
- Be sure to support the lumbar area of your back. Remind yourself to lean against the backrest instead of leaning into the steering wheel. If your lower back does not feel supported, you can use a small cushion or tightly wrapped towel. Just make sure it does not force you into too much of a curve.
- Don't fret at red lights—use the time to loosen those muscles. You can stretch your neck by pulling your chin to your chest and rotating your head side to side and down to your shoulders. Also, try rotating your shoulders and making a fist and releasing it.
- Avoid awkward posture and back and leg pain by taking all items out of your back pocket.
- If your back, neck, legs or arms hurt while driving, you should take a break at a rest stop and go for a short walk.
- Finally, stress adds to muscle tension, so be sure to give yourself enough time to get to work.

For more information, contact the AFT health and safety team at 4healthandsafety@aft.org [June 2022]

¹House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, “The Just-in-Time Professor: A Staff Report Summarizing eForum Responses on the Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education,” January 2014,

<http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/documents/1.24.14-AdjunctEforumReport.pdf>.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.7 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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