

## **DRIVING WITH RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS**

Rheumatic disease includes nearly 100 different conditions, which cause pain in the joints and connective tissue throughout the body. The key factor in the most serious forms of rheumatic disease is inflammation evidenced by heat, swelling, redness, stiffness, and pain. Depending on the areas affected and functional ability, either a sedan or van may be an appropriate vehicle choice. Loss of joint mobility may result in diminished ability to reach, grasp, manipulate, and release objects. Strength, endurance, and range of motion difficulties may necessitate adaptive devices: such as extra mirrors, key holders, extended gear shift levers, power windows and door locks. More extensive adaptive equipment or vehicle modifications may be needed for persons whose ability to use their arms and legs are severely affected by the disease.

**Driving a sedan:** When considering the use of a sedan, the individual must be able to do the following:

- Lock and Unlock the door
- Open and close the door
- Transfer to and from the wheelchair if applicable
- Store and retrieve the wheelchair (either independently or with a wheelchair loading device)

Since characteristics and dimensions of vehicles vary, it is important that the individual performs these functions in the vehicle being considered prior to purchase. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide recommendations for sedan selection.

**Driving a van:** If an individual is unable to drive a sedan, there are several options available for driving a van. Specialized modifications can allow a person to transfer to the driver seat or to drive from the wheelchair. There are several levels of driving control technology to compensate for the loss of strength and/or range of motion. Some of these include:

- **Reduced effort steering systems** to compensate for reduced strength
- **Joystick driving systems**, allowing one hand operation of brake, accelerator and steering.

Adaptive equipment and vehicle modifications for wheelchair access are available for some full-size and mini vans; however, all vans are not suitable for modifications. A driver rehabilitation specialist can assist in making the correct van choice.