



September 2016

Driving and Your Health

Your questions answered

For most people being able to drive a motor vehicle is a very important part of their daily life – for maintaining social contact, for getting to and from work, and for accessing their everyday needs such as food and services. Driving can also be essential to employment.

But with the benefits of being able to drive also come certain responsibilities and one of these responsibilities is to make sure you are well enough to drive safely.

Some health conditions can affect your ability to drive safely, either in the short term or more permanently. This brochure explains:

- the types of illnesses that might affect your ability to drive safely
- your responsibilities
- how your doctor can help you
- where you can go for further information and assistance.

What type of health conditions might affect your ability to drive safely?

Driving a motor vehicle is a complex task requiring perception, good judgement, responsiveness and reasonable physical capability. A range of medical conditions, as well as treatments, may therefore impair your driving ability. Common examples include:

- Blackouts or fainting
- Dementia and cognitive impairment
- Seizures and epilepsy
- Other neurological conditions
- Diabetes
- Psychiatric conditions
- Heart disease
- Sleep disorders
- Vision problems
- Alcohol and substance misuse

Just because you have a disease or condition that might affect your driving doesn't mean that you won't be able to drive at all. It might mean that you have to see your doctor more often to check that your condition is well managed and it might mean that there are some restrictions placed on your driving.

Who makes the rules about whether you are well enough to drive?

The rules about health and driving are developed by medical experts and are agreed to by all driver licensing authorities.

Your doctor does not make the rules but provides advice about how your particular health condition might affect your ability to drive safely and how it might be managed. The driver licensing authority always makes the final decision about your licence status. They will consider the advice of your doctor as well as other factors such as your accident history and the type of vehicle you drive (for example a truck, car or a public passenger vehicle).

What are your legal responsibilities?

All states and territories in Australia have laws about reporting health conditions that might affect your ability to drive safely. These laws have been created to protect public safety.

The laws require you to report to your driver licensing authority, any permanent or long-term illness that is likely to affect your ability to drive safely.

Your doctor is able to advise you on whether or not you should be reporting a condition to the driver licensing authority. When you report your illness it doesn't necessarily mean that your licence will be taken away. It does mean that the driver licensing authority can work with you and your doctor to manage your condition with respect to your driving.

What if your condition is only temporary?

Many temporary conditions will prevent you from driving. For example, following an anaesthetic your doctor will advise you not to drive for 24 hours or more. An injury, such as a broken leg may also prevent you from driving. In these types of circumstances your doctor will advise you about the need to restrict your driving in the short term. In most cases your licence status will not be affected and you will not need to report the temporary medical condition to the driver licensing authority.

How will your doctor assess whether or not you should be driving?

When assessing your ability to drive safely, your doctor will consider your physical and psychological health. He or she will refer to a book of medical standards, called *Assessing Fitness to Drive*, which is used by all doctors throughout Australia and which describes specific requirements for various diseases and conditions. You can view these standards on the internet at: www.austroads.com.au

Sometimes it can be difficult to make an assessment and your doctor may refer you for a practical driver assessment or to a medical specialist.



What is a conditional licence?

In most cases, having a medical condition will not stop you from driving as the licensing authority is able to issue a conditional licence. This means that you may continue to drive as long as certain conditions or restrictions are met. Conditions may include driving during daylight hours, the wearing of corrective lenses when driving, or attending your doctor for a periodic review and providing a medical report to the driver licensing authority. Your doctor may make recommendations to the driver licensing authority about a conditional licence but the authority will make the final decision.

If you are issued with a conditional licence it is your responsibility to comply with any driving restrictions or other conditions and to be reviewed by your doctor as required.

Will your doctor notify the licensing authority if you are not well enough to drive?

As the relationship between you and your doctor is a confidential one, your doctor will not normally communicate directly with the driver licensing authority. He or she will provide you with advice about your ability to drive safely as well as a letter or report to take to the authority.

Doctors also have an obligation to public safety so your doctor may notify the driver licensing authority directly if he or she feels your condition poses a significant threat to public safety.

What happens if you don't follow your doctor's advice?

If you continue to drive despite your doctor's advice and you do not report your condition to the driver licensing authority, you are not fulfilling your legal responsibility. If you are involved in a crash under these circumstances and it is found that your health condition was a contributing factor, you may be prosecuted and your insurance may not be valid.

If your doctor is aware that you are continuing to drive and feels that your driving is a serious risk to you and other road users, he or she may feel obliged to notify the driver licensing authority directly.

What if you have a licence to drive a commercial vehicle?

Professional drivers such as drivers of trucks, public passenger vehicles and vehicles carrying dangerous goods must meet higher medical standards because of the demands of their work, the extensive hours spent on the road and the serious consequences likely to result from a crash.

If you have an illness that is likely to impact on your ability to drive safely, it is important to tell your doctor what sort of vehicle you drive. It may be that with treatment and regular review you will be able to continue to drive on a conditional licence.

A person who does not meet the health requirements to drive a commercial vehicle may still be eligible to drive a private vehicle.

You are concerned about a friend or relative's safety on the road. How might you help them?

If you know someone whose health might be affecting their ability to drive safely, it is important to get them to talk to their doctor. It may be that, with appropriate treatment or driving restrictions, they can continue to drive on a conditional licence. Their doctor may also be able to suggest alternative transport solutions. If they are unwilling to discuss this with a doctor, you should contact the driver licensing authority who will deal with the matter confidentially.

Need more information?

See the Austroads website www.austroads.com.au or contact the driver licensing authority in your state or territory. See contact details below.

Australian Capital Territory

Road User Services

Phone: 13 22 81

Email: rus@act.gov.au

Web: www.rego.act.gov.au

New South Wales

Roads and Maritime Services

Phone: 13 22 13

Email: info@service.nsw.gov.au

Web : www.rms.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

Department of Transport

Phone: 1300 654 628

(08) 8999 3111 (outside NT)

Email: mvr@nt.gov.au

Web: www.transport.nt.gov.au

Queensland

Department of Transport and Main Roads

Phone: 13 23 80

Web: www.tmr.qld.gov.au

South Australia

Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure

Phone: 13 10 84

Email: dpti.enquiriesadministrator@sa.gov.au

Web: www.sa.gov.au

Tasmania

Department of State Growth

Phone: 1300 135 513

Email: dlu@stategrowth.tas.gov.au

Web: www.transport.tas.gov.au

Victoria

VicRoads Medical Review

Phone: 13 11 71

Email: medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Web: www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/medical-conditions-and-driving/medical-review

Western Australia

Department of Transport

Phone: 13 11 56

Web: www.transport.wa.gov.au