



Driving commercial vehicles

Why is your health important?

You spend a lot of time on the road – it's demanding work and you can be responsible for large and heavy loads, passengers or dangerous goods. Your health is therefore important for your own safety and that of the public.

What type of health problems might affect your fitness to drive?

Driving a heavy vehicle, and indeed any motor vehicle, is a complex task requiring:

- sensory perception, including vision and hearing to take on board what's happening so that you can respond accordingly
- physical ability, including muscle power and coordination to operate the vehicle, and
- mental capacity, including:
 - » the ability to concentrate and pay attention to what's going on around you
 - » the ability to understand and interpret the inputs from the road environment and more generally, including signs and signals, road rules, etc
 - » sound judgement and the ability to make appropriate decisions, including in an emergency situation
 - » good reaction time to respond to changing circumstances on the road
 - » good insight, including insight into your own abilities, behaviours and limitations.

Several health problems could affect your ability to drive safely and conduct other duties associated with your work as a commercial driver. These include:

- heart disease
- diabetes
- sleep disorders
- epilepsy and other neurological conditions
- blackouts and fainting
- psychiatric disorders and other conditions, such as substance misuse or dependence, that affect your thinking or behaviour
- vision problems
- musculoskeletal conditions
- general age-related decline.

Sleep disorders for example are common and have been found to increase the rate of crashes by seven times compared to drivers who do not have a sleep disorder.

The good news is that most of the conditions listed above can be effectively treated so that you can continue to drive. The important thing is to seek medical advice.

What are the medical standards for driving?

The national medical standards Assessing Fitness to Drive support road safety. They set out criteria for medical conditions that are likely to affect fitness to drive. They also describe how these conditions are assessed and managed to support safety, including through the application of 'conditional licences'



Assessing Fitness to Drive standards help inform fitness for duty decisions for various heavy vehicle accreditation programs such as the National Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme, the Western Australian Heavy Vehicle Registration Scheme and TruckSafe.



Assessing Fitness to Drive contains two sets of standards – one for private vehicle drivers and one for commercial vehicle drivers. Given the additional demands and risks of commercial driving, the medical criteria for fitness to drive are set higher for these drivers. Health professionals use them in the assessment and management of medical conditions with respect to driving. Driver licensing authorities use them to support consistent and fair decision-making about fitness to drive and licensing.

What are the legal responsibilities around medical fitness to drive?

If you are not fit to drive, you must not drive a vehicle. This is an obligation under road safety law in all States and Territories. For commercial drivers it is an additional obligation under Work Health and Safety law. You must report to the Driver Licensing Authority any health condition that may affect your ability to drive safely.

Your doctor can advise you if you have any conditions that might impact on your ability to drive. They may give you a report to provide to the Driver Licensing Authority. In Victoria and New South Wales, those reports can be submitted directly to the licensing authority via an online reporting portal.

In South Australia and the Northern Territory, medical practitioners are obliged by law to report to the driver licensing authority any person that they determine is not fit to drive due to a medical condition.

In other States and Territories, if your doctor or employer 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 report directly to the Driver Licensing Authority.

What is a conditional licence and how will it affect your work?

A person with a medical condition that may affect their driving (e.g., diabetes, sleep disorder, vision problems) will not necessarily be unfit to drive, and will not necessarily lose their drivers licence, or be unfit for duty.

The vast majority of people will continue to drive during treatment and regular monitoring ensures their medical condition is well-controlled. In these circumstances, the person will be conditionally fit to drive and may continue to drive on a conditional licence. They will likely require regular medical review to confirm their ongoing

fitness and compliance with treatment, and may have certain restrictions, such as wearing corrective lenses when driving.

As a commercial vehicle driver, you may be subject to more frequent medical review than private drivers with the same medical condition in line with increased risks when driving commercially.

Holding a conditional licence, provided there are no restrictions that affect your job tasks, should not affect your employment status as a driver.

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 to the Driver Licensing Authority or to your employer, you are not fulfilling your legal responsibility. If you have a crash under these circumstances, you may be prosecuted, and your insurance will not be valid.

For more information about driving and your health:

- speak to your local doctor
- speak to the person at your workplace responsible for health and safety matters
- visit austroads.com.au