

Driving and 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 and disabilities that might affect your ability to drive safely
- your responsibilities
- how your healthcare providers can help you
- where you can go for further information and assistance.

What type of health conditions or disabilities 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 and disabilities, 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 or neurodevelopmental conditions
- Diabetes
- Musculoskeletal disorders or injuries
- Psychiatric conditions
- Heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions
- Sleep disorders
- Vision problems
- Alcohol and substance misuse

Just because you have a condition that might affect your driving doesn't mean that you won't be able to drive or that you will lose your licence. It might mean that you have to see your doctor or other healthcare professional more often to check that your condition is well managed and it might mean that there are some restrictions placed on your driving. This will result in the issuing of a conditional licence as described overleaf.



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.

Healthcare professionals do not make the rules but provide 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 health professional advice 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 and disabilities 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 treating healthcare professional 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 healthcare team to manage your condition with respect to your driving.

How do health professionals assess whether or not you should be driving?

When assessing your ability to drive safely, your treating health professional will consider your physical and psychological health. They will refer to a publication called *Assessing Fitness to Drive*, which contains medical standards for driving and applies throughout Australia. You can view these standards on the Internet at: www.austroads.com.au.

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

Which healthcare professionals can assess your fitness to drive?

All health professionals can and should consider fitness to drive when managing a person's health and provide advice accordingly. The *Assessing Fitness to Drive* standards are a resource for guiding advice on driving.

However, only certain health professionals can make a formal recommendation to the driver licensing authority regarding fitness to hold a driver licence. These health professionals are defined in state and territory road transport legislation. For example, in Victoria, reports to VicRoads about fitness to drive are accepted from medical practitioners, optometrists and occupational therapists. The legislation is summarised in Appendix 3.2 of *Assessing Fitness to Drive*.

Of course, any member of the public can make a report about an unsafe driver, and that includes other health professionals such as nurses, paramedics, psychologists, pharmacists etc. However, those reports do not determine licensing – they will likely result in the driver being referred to their treating doctor (or other permitted health professional) for a formal fitness to drive assessment, the result of which will be considered by the driver licensing authority when they make the licensing decision.

If you are in doubt, it is a good idea to go to the legislation in your state or territory or contact your driver licensing authority.

What if your condition is 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.

What is a conditional licence?

In most cases, having a medical condition or disability 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 or prostheses when driving, or attending your healthcare professional for a periodic review to demonstrate your ongoing fitness to drive. Your healthcare professional 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 healthcare professional as required.

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

As the relationship between you and your treating healthcare professional is a confidential one, the health professional will normally advise you to make a report to the driver licensing authority in the first instance. If you consent to them making a direct report, they may also do that. In some states/territories (Victoria and New South Wales) such reports can be made online which means the decision about licensing, including conditional licensing, can be made quickly.

In South Australia and the Northern Territory, reporting to the driver licensing authority is mandatory for certain health professionals if they assess a person to be unfit to drive. In South Australia this applies to medical practitioners, physiotherapists and opticians. In the Northern Territory, this applies to medical practitioners, optometrists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

All health professionals have an obligation to public safety so they may notify the driver licensing authority directly if they feel your condition poses a significant threat to public safety. Legislation in most states and territories provides protection for health professionals making such reports.

What happens if you don't follow your treating health professional's advice?

If you continue to drive despite advice to discontinue driving or 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 healthcare professional is aware that you are continuing to drive and feels that your driving is a serious risk to you and other road users, they 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 treating health professional 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

Access Canberra

Phone: 13 22 81

Email: lara@act.gov.au

Web: www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au

New South Wales

Transport for NSW

Phone: 13 22 13

Email: info@service.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.rms.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

Motor Vehicle Registry

Phone: 1300 654 628 / (08) 8999 3111

Email: mvr.medical@nt.gov.au

Web: www.nt.gov.au

Queensland

Department of Transport and Main Roads

Phone: 13 23 80

Email: lavr@tmr.qld.gov.au

Web: www.tmr.qld.gov.au

South Australia

Department for Infrastructure and Transport

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: 1300 852 722

Email: driverservices@transport.wa.gov.au

Web: www.transport.wa.gov.au

Assessing Fitness to Drive details the Australian medical standards for driver licensing. It is used by health professionals and driver licensing authorities.

For more information visit the Austroads website <https://austroads.com.au>

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