

# Information for patients on Driving and Pain

## Who decides if it is safe for me to drive?

If you have a medical condition listed by the [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency \(DVLA\)](#) or are having treatment that could affect your being able to drive safely, you should discuss this with your doctor. You must tell the DVLA, who decides if a person is medically safe to drive. While you are waiting for the decision from the DVLA, your doctor can discuss with you if it is safe to continue driving and you must decide if you are fit to drive. It is your decision, but if you ignore medical advice to stop driving it may affect your motor insurance cover, and you may be prosecuted if you are involved in an accident.

## Am I able to drive while taking pain medicines?

Yes, but only if your ability to drive safely is not affected (the DVLA refer to this as being 'impaired'). Many medicines prescribed to help manage pain may cause side-effects such as dizziness or sleepiness. This may make you less able to drive safely.

**You must not drive if you think your medicines are affecting how you drive.**

## What symptoms may mean I cannot drive safely?

Do not drive if you have symptoms that reduce your ability to drive safely. The DVLA and Police describe this as being 'impaired'.

Drugs can affect your driving in many ways:

- ▶ being able to judge speed and distance
- ▶ reaction and coordination skills
- ▶ blurry or reduced vision
- ▶ sleepiness
- ▶ aggression
- ▶ changeable behaviour

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- ▶ panic attacks
- ▶ visions (hallucinations)
- ▶ feeling sick
- ▶ dizziness
- ▶ shaking (tremors)

These symptoms can occur as side effects of medicines. Pain itself can also affect sleep, concentration and how your body works.

### When might I be at risk of not driving safely?

There are certain times when your ability to drive safely is most at risk. Be very careful:

- ▶ When you start a new pain medicine
- ▶ When increasing or reducing the dose of a pain medicine
- ▶ If you start taking another medicine that could mean you are not safe to drive
- ▶ If you take an over-the-counter medicine that could also affect your driving
- ▶ If you drink alcohol with some pain medicines you are much more likely to have an accident.

### Do I need to tell the DVLA when I start a new medicine?

You do not generally need to inform the DVLA when you start medicines for pain. However, there may be other information about your condition(s) that the DVLA needs to know. Your doctor or the DVLA can discuss this with you. As mentioned above, you must inform the DVLA if you are diagnosed with a listed condition.

### Do I need to inform my motor vehicle insurance company?

We strongly advise you to inform your motor vehicle insurance company about your health and what medicine(s) you are taking to make sure your motor insurance is valid.

### The 'Drug Driving' law

If you have been prescribed one of the following medicines, you may be affected by this law:

- ▶ morphine or related drugs (such as codeine, tramadol, fentanyl or methadone)
- ▶ diazepam or related drugs (such as clonazepam, diazepam, oxazepam, temazepam, lorazepam, or flunitrazepam)
- ▶ ketamine, amphetamine (e.g. dexamphetamine or selegiline)
- ▶ cannabinoids (e.g. Sativex, cannabis).

In England, Scotland and Wales it is a criminal offence to drive above a set limit for these types of medicines (like the current rules on alcohol and driving). You may test above the legal limit even if you are taking the correct prescribed dose of this type of medicine. You should carry a copy of your hospital letter or your prescription to show the police if you are ever stopped.

You have a medical defence and you should not be prosecuted under the 'drug driving law' if:

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- ▶ you are taking these medicines at the level your doctor, nurse or pharmacist has prescribed and,
- ▶ your ability to drive safely is not reduced (impaired)

This defence cannot be used if the police think your driving ability is reduced due to medicines. They may ask you to perform tests at the roadside to check your balance and co-ordination.

The following link gives guidance on what conditions/medicines you need to inform the DVLA about:

<https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving>

The following websites provides further information on medicines and illegal drugs and driving law:

[Drugs and driving: the law](https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law)

<https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>

[Alcohol and drug driving](https://www.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rs/road-safety/alcohol-drug-driving/)

<https://www.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rs/road-safety/alcohol-drug-driving/>