

# Driving and prescription drugs

## **Q: What does the law say?**

It is illegal to drive if your driving is impaired by drugs or if you have certain drugs above a specified level in your blood. This can be tested by police using a swab of your saliva, and if that shows drugs in your system, they might arrange a blood test.

However, your medications do not automatically disqualify you from driving. If you are on a stable dose, and your driving is not affected, then you can drive while on prescription medicines. You must not drive if your doctor advises you not to.

If you are stopped for a random drug-driving test, it is important to be able to prove that the medication has been prescribed for you. So it would be a good idea to keep evidence of your prescription with you whenever driving (eg keep an up to date prescription with your driver's licence).

## **Q: Which drugs might stop me from driving safely?**

Your doctor or nurse should warn you if your medication might make it unsafe for you to drive.

Medications that are commonly used in palliative care that might affect your driving include:

- Medicines that help you sleep at night or relax you (eg lorazepam / clonazepam / diazepam / flunitrazepam / oxazepam / temazepam)
- Medicines that relieve pain (eg morphine/oxycodone, fentanyl, methadone, gabapentin/pregabalin/amitriptyline/nortriptyline)
- Medicines that treat sickness (eg haloperidol, levomepromazine, cyclizine, metoclopramide)
- Medicines for depression (eg mirtazepine, mianserin, doxepin, amitriptyline)

- Medicines to treat fits/seizures (eg phenobarbital, carbamazepine, valproate)

**Q: So what should I do?**

You can drive after taking these drugs if:

- You've been prescribed them and followed advice on how to take them by a healthcare professional

**AND**

- They aren't causing you to be unfit to drive even if you're above the specified limits

If you are unsure about whether it is safe to drive, the following information will help:

- You must not drive if you feel sleepy
- You must not drive after drinking alcohol or taking strong drugs which have not been prescribed or recommended by your doctor, eg cannabis
- You must not drive if you start taking other drugs that cause sleepiness, either prescribed by your doctor or bought from the chemist for example, hay fever medicine
- You must not drive on days where you have had to take extra (breakthrough or rescue) doses of a strong painkiller

**Q: Who do I need to inform about driving and my medication?**

Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency

You do not need to inform the DVLA that you are starting a strong painkiller. However there may be other information about your illness that the DVLA needs to know. Your doctors or the DVLA can advise you about this.

## Car insurance

You may need to inform your motor insurance company about your current state of health and what medication you are taking. Each insurance company is different, so it is best to discuss your circumstances with yours to be sure that you are covered.

### **Q: What could happen if it is not safe for me to drive, but I drive anyway?**

The worst thing that could happen is that you or someone else could be seriously injured. There could be legal consequences too. The penalties for drug-driving are the same as for drink-driving. If you are convicted you will receive:

- A minimum 12-month driving ban
- A criminal record
- A fine of up to £5000 or up to 6 months in prison or both

### **Q: What precautions should I take if I am restarting driving?**

- Begin by taking a short trip
- Use a quiet road when the light is good
- Take a companion who can take over driving if required

## Further help

A member of the hospital palliative care team, your community specialist nurse or your GP will be happy to help you decide when it is safe to drive.

If your mobility is limited you may be entitled to a Blue Badge, which you can apply for on-line at [www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge](http://www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge).