



Driving after a traumatic brain injury

Patient Information Leaflet



How could a traumatic brain injury affect my driving?

Safe driving is a complex activity which needs many different skills. Following a brain injury people can have problems that can impair their ability to drive.

Symptoms that can affect your driving include:

- Problems with vision and hearing
- Difficulties with muscle weakness, control and co-ordination
- Sudden and disabling dizziness
- Fatigue
- Slowed thinking and reaction times
- Memory problems – difficulty in knowing where you are going and how to get there
- Being more impulsive and having anger outbursts
- Loss of ability to read road signs or maps
- Reduced ability to concentrate, to anticipate danger, to plan ahead and be aware of your own limitations
- After a brain injury the risk of developing seizures or epilepsy is slightly increased.

Who is not fit to drive after a traumatic brain injury?

This depends on the severity of the brain injury and any disabling symptoms caused by it. You should not drive until you have recovered from any symptoms that would affect safe driving such as those mentioned above.

Serious Brain Injury

If you have had a serious brain injury you must not drive and must inform the Driving Vehicle and Licensing Agency (DVLA).

A serious brain injury may include one or more of the following features:

- Being unconscious following the injury
- Being confused and disorientated for over 24 hours after the injury (post traumatic amnesia)
- Having a seizure (fit) caused by the injury
- Developing epilepsy following the injury
- Having a haematoma, brain haemorrhage ⁽¹⁾ (bleeding into the brain) or a contusion (bruising on the brain)
- Having surgery to your brain or skull following a brain injury
- Having a visual field defect (loss of a section of vision)

If you have had a serious brain injury then you are likely to require 6-12 months off driving.

If you have developed epilepsy following a brain injury then you will need to comply with the DVLA guidance for epilepsy.

1. The exception to this is where there has been a small traumatic subarachnoid haemorrhage with no other brain injury.

Minor Brain Injury

Even if you have had a minor brain injury you should still not return to driving until you have recovered from any symptoms that could affect safe driving. This would include **sudden and disabling dizziness, poor concentration and blurred vision**. These symptoms usually resolve within a few months. If you have had a minor brain injury you can usually return to driving once you have recovered and will not need to inform the DVLA unless you are advised to do so by your doctor. However if you have disabling symptoms that last over three months then you should take advice from your doctor as you may need to inform the DVLA.

If you are a Group 2 licence holder (heavy goods vehicle or public service vehicle) then the regulations are much stricter. It is advisable to notify the DVLA of any brain injury.

If you are unsure about the seriousness of your brain injury then ask your doctor about this. In some cases your doctor may need to contact the medical advisors at the DVLA for specific advice.

Who decides on whether a person is fit to drive after a traumatic brain injury?

Your doctor will advise you whether your injury is likely to affect your driving ability and whether you need to inform the DVLA of your injury. If you are advised to inform the DVLA then it is your responsibility to do this by law. The doctor will advise whether you are safe to drive while the DVLA is dealing with your case. The final decision on fitness to drive is made by the DVLA.

Information on how to inform the DVLA of your injury is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/report-driving-medical-condition>

You can telephone the DVLA on Telephone: 0300 790 6806
Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm
Saturdays, 8am to 2pm

Or write to: Drivers' Medical Enquiries, DVLA Swansea, SA99
1TU

What happens when the DVLA are informed?

A trained medical advisor will look at your case and make a decision on your fitness to drive.

The DVLA will then contact you to advise you of one or more of the following actions:

- You are fit to drive
- You will need to get a new licence
- You must adapt your car
- You must have a medical assessment.
- You must not drive and you must give up your licence. This is called having your licence revoked and is usually for a specified time period. The DVLA will advise you when you can reapply for your licence.

What happens if I have a Group 2 licence?

The rules for returning to driving are stricter as the safety of more people is involved. The process of informing the DVLA is the same.

What if I drive a taxi, emergency services vehicle or health services vehicle?

There are additional requirements for these drivers so you would need to discuss this with your doctor and employer.

Should I inform my insurance company?

Yes, if you have had any type of brain injury that has affected your ability to drive you should inform your insurance company that you are planning on returning to driving. If you are fit to drive then this should not affect your insurance premiums.

What if I do not follow the advice of my doctor and do not inform the DVLA?

If your doctor has advised you to inform the DVLA and you do not do so you will be breaking the law and this would invalidate your driving licence and insurance. You could also be liable for a £1000 fine for failing to inform the DVLA.

If you have been advised that you are not fit to drive and you continue to do so then you will be putting yourself and other road users at risk. If you cannot be persuaded to stop driving and your doctor is concerned for public safety then they may inform the DVLA on your behalf.

What if I want further advice on getting back to driving?

You can have a driving assessment at your nearest drive mobility centre. Further information can be found at <https://www.drivingmobility.org.uk/find-a-centre/>

What help is available if I cannot drive due to a traumatic brain injury?

There may be concessions on public transport available through your local council or the bus/rail company. For those who are unable to travel on public transport there may be help available from the Access to Work Scheme.

Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

Telephone: 0800 121 7479

Further information

This booklet was written by the Northumberland Head Injuries Service. The information in this booklet is based on the guidelines updated by the DVLA in March 2020. The guidance from the DVLA is constantly being updated as new evidence regarding brain injuries becomes available.

Please note that the DVLA reserve the right to consider all cases reported to them on an individual basis. Therefore if it is unclear whether you should be driving then the safest option is to wait for a verdict from the DVLA before resuming driving.

References

1. GOV.UK. Fitness to drive in Traumatic brain injury March 2020 [online]
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neurological-disorders-assessing-fitness-to-drive#traumatic-brain-injury>
Accessed 11/02/2021
2. Headway. Driving after brain injury 2020 [online]
<https://www.headway.org.uk/media/8365/driving-after-brain-injury-e-booklet-2020.pdf>
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