

Leicestershire Adult Eating Disorders Service

DRIVING AND EATING DISORDERS

This leaflet outlines the way in which anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders may affect your ability to drive and advises you of your responsibilities with respect to the DVLA.

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Driving and Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa can affect your ability to drive in a number of ways

- Your muscle strength can be weakened and this lack of power can affect the speed and strength of control of the vehicle.
- Periods of fasting and resultant episodes of hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) can cause dizziness, loss of concentration, and inattentiveness. Reaction times may be delayed.
- Relative hypothermia (low temperature) can slow reaction time and impair concentration.
- Low potassium can cause muscle twitching and jerking
- It has been known for patients with osteoporosis (thin bones) to sustain fractures while driving.

Even at normal BMI driving can be affected

- Periods of fasting and relative hypoglycaemia can make you slow and inattentive. This usually rapidly reverses with adequate nutrition, and you are advised to take appropriate nutrition an hour before driving and maintain this during your driving.
- Potassium levels can be low even at normal BMI and this can cause muscle twitching and jerking.

So, as you can see, there are lots of complicating factors which can impact on your ability to safely drive, and it is impossible for us to have a definitive BMI at which we can say it is absolutely safe to drive.

However, if your BMI is less than 15 then there is a strong chance that your ability to drive is compromised and for this reason we recommend that you do not drive. Above this BMI, if there are other complicating factors, we advise you check with your doctor first.

Our responsibilities as health care professionals

If you are under the care of a specialist for your eating disorder then your clinician will probably discuss fitness to drive with you. However, whether or not this is discussed with you, please be aware of your own responsibilities.

If a doctor thinks you are unfit to drive, then they have a legal obligation to inform you not to drive. If you do not take this advice, doctors are also under a legal obligation to notify the Driver and Vehicles Licensing

Centre (DVLA) and can do so without your permission if they feel the risks are high.

What the DVLA guidance says about your responsibilities

You must advise the DVLA of any new medical condition which was not present at the time your license was issued. Failure to do so is a criminal offence and is punishable by a fine of up to £1,000. Furthermore, if you continue to drive with a medical condition you have not informed the DVLA about, then your insurance cover may not be valid.

There is a long list of reportable conditions in the DVLA guidance, but those which are most likely to be relevant to you are

- Anorexia nervosa if it affects your ability to drive
- Dizziness (giddiness) that is sudden or disabling
- Depression if it affects your driving
- Blackouts, fainting
- Things that impair your consciousness or awareness.

The DVLA also advise that if you have hypoglycaemia, you should cease driving while liable to these episodes.

Once you have informed the DVLA you will normally be asked to complete a medical questionnaire and to give consent for one of the DVLA medical advisors to contact your doctor for information. If possible, a decision will be made on the information you provide but in some circumstances the DVLA may need to arrange for you to be examined by a medical officer or undergo a driving assessment. The DVLA will then make a decision about your license. The possibilities are

- You may be able to retain your license
- You may be issued with a license for a limited period
- Your license may be revoked temporarily or permanently
- You may also voluntarily surrender your license which removes the need for the DVLA to make formal medical enquiries

Contacting the DVLA

Further information is available on the DVLA website (<https://www.gov.uk/dvla-medical-enquiries>). Or you can contact the Drivers Medical Group at the following address:

Drivers Medical Enquiries

DVLA
Swansea

Phone: 0300 790 6806
SA99 1TU