

DIABETES AND DRIVING

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Ordinary Driving Licences: informing the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

- It is a statutory requirement for the patient to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) when receiving treatment with insulin or oral antidiabetic drugs. The DVLA need not be informed if treatment is with diet alone but must be informed when treatment is started with oral medication or if changed to insulin therapy, either alone or in combination with antidiabetic drugs.
- Patients treated with insulin will be sent a Diabetic 1 form which will ask for further details including the name of the patient's GP or hospital physician and for consent to approach that doctor directly if necessary for relevant information to assess medical fitness to drive.
- If insulin-treated, the licence will be issued for 1, 2 or 3 years. If treated with oral medication, the usual "till 70" licence will be retained providing there are no other medical conditions which may prevent this.
- The DVLA must be informed if any other medical problems or diabetic complications develop which could affect the safety of driving, irrespective of the method of treatment required for diabetes.
- Contact address and telephone number:
Medical Adviser
Drivers Medical Unit
DVLA
Longview Road
Swansea SA99 1TU

Telephone 0870 600 0301
Web address: www.dvla.gov.uk

Vocational Driving Licences for Large Goods Vehicles and Passenger Carrying Vehicles

- Since April 1991 the issue of a Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) or Passenger Carrying Vehicle (PCV) licence is not permitted by statute to people treated with insulin. A person holding an LGV or PCV licence will have their vocational driving licence revoked when they commence to treatment with insulin.
- The only exception is drivers who had type 1 diabetes and were issued with such a licence before April 1991 when the law was changed. will retain a vocational driving licence under "Grandfather's Rights" These cases are dealt with individually and licences can be reissued annually subject to a satisfactory medical review.
- LGV or PCV licences can be held by people treated with diet or Oral antidiabetic drugs providing there are no visual or medical problems.

Lighter Goods/Smaller Passenger Vehicles

Since January 1998, drivers on insulin have been barred from driving vehicles in D1 category (small passenger carrying vehicles for 8 or more passengers). Regulation changes in April 2001 allow 'exceptional case' insulin-treated drivers to apply for or retain their entitlement to drive class C1 (3500-7500kgs lorries) subject to annual medical examination.

Hypoglycaemia

The main problem is the possibility of hypoglycaemia occurring while driving.

To avoid hypoglycaemia drivers should be advised to:

- abstain completely from alcohol when driving
- Always carry fast acting carbohydrate food which is easily accessible in the car e.g. a glucose drink, or confectionary
- Drive for no more than 2 hours without eating a snack
- Check blood glucose before and at 2 hour intervals during journeys
- Carry identification indicating that they have diabetes

If symptoms of hypoglycaemia do occur while driving, drivers should be advised to:

- Stop the vehicle in a suitable location as soon as it is safe to do so
- Immediately take a glucose drink or tablets
- Remove the ignition key and move into a passenger seat to avoid any suggestion that the person remain in charge of the car
- Do not recommence driving until 45 minutes after blood glucose has been restored to normal (because of delayed cognitive recovery)

Diabetic drivers should know that if they have an accident attributable to hypoglycaemia they render themselves liable to the charge of driving under the influence of drugs.

Visual Standards

Visual standards relating to driving are identical to those applied generally. The driver should be able to read a number plate (7.9cm) at a distance of 20.5 metres and have a visual field of at least 120° in the horizontal axis and at least 20° in the vertical axis. This approximates to an equivalent Snellen Chart corrected acuity of 6/12. If in doubt, refer specifically to the Ophthalmology Clinic for formal assessment. People who have had laser therapy for diabetic eye disease may require formal testing of their visual fields with perimetry to ensure that they meet the required standard for driving.

Motor Insurance

Diabetes must be disclosed either when arranging a new policy or at the time of diagnosis. Change in treatment or the development of new complications should be disclosed when they occur and should not await renewal of the policy.

Failure to notify the insurer can invalidate cover in the event of a claim.

Not all insurance companies will load their policies for diabetes in the same way and there is no single insurance scheme which will be the cheapest in every case. Contact Diabetes UK for further advice.