

# Learning to drive with a disability

## Road Safety and Medical Review

Victoria's vision is to create a safe system of roads, laws, vehicles, drivers and behaviour that supports the safe movement of our community. This includes supporting people with a disability when they consider learning to drive.

### What is Fitness to Drive?

Some medical or congenital conditions and disabilities may have an impact on the ability to drive safely. People with such conditions are encouraged to speak to their doctor and treating team to understand the potential functional impact that their condition may have on driving. This should occur before they consider applying for a learner permit.

All drivers and people hoping to learn to drive are required by law to notify Medical Review of any serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, medical condition or injury that may affect their fitness to drive.

When a report is submitted to Medical Review, each person's case is reviewed based on health professional information about the functional implications of their individual experience of their disability.

This information assists Medical Review to determine their fitness to drive according to the National Medical Fitness to Drive Standards. The Medical Review process considers the outcome that is best for the safety of the individual and the community. The current version of the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Guidelines can be accessed from [austroads.com.au](http://austroads.com.au).

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information about applying for a learner permit, how some conditions may affect an individual's capacity to drive, and when (or whether) a person with a disability who is hoping to learn to drive should report to Medical Review. Some conditions may be present from birth, such as attention deficit disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or autism, cerebral palsy and some intellectual impairments.

Other conditions such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) or stroke may have been acquired prior to the minimum age to be eligible for obtaining a learner permit or licence.

### Skill requirements for safe driving

Driving a motor vehicle safely relies on the ability to control a vehicle within a complex and sometimes unpredictable environment. The driver must have reliable and consistent:

- sensory function and processing: e.g. vision, body awareness e.g. position of limbs in space (without looking)
- physical function
- cognitive and thinking abilities

Driving safely also entails interpreting information and quick problem solving under time pressure, often in a high-risk context. Even minor errors can lead to crashes causing injuries or fatalities.

## Understanding your condition

There are many conditions which may have a functional impact on an individual's driving performance. This fact sheet provides information on some of the factors that may affect driving. It is important to remember that no two people are the same, and the impact on driving performance for two individuals with the same diagnosed condition may be vastly different.

Some conditions like autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy or TBI can have very little effect on an individual's ability to drive. Conversely, for other people, these conditions can affect their potential to drive to the degree that driving is not a safe option for them.

It is important to determine, with the assistance of a health care professional if relevant, the effect that your condition may have on driving. Consider cognitive, or thinking, abilities that are important for driving, including:

- the ability to sustain concentration or switch attention between multiple driving tasks
- cognitive and perceptual processing speeds, including reaction times
- the ability to perform in complex conditions (e.g. when there are multiple distractions)
- the ability to direct attention to the most important aspects of the driving environment and respond appropriately
- information processing, judgement, and adaptability in unexpected situations
- the ability to anticipate and respond to other road user behaviour.

People with conditions that can affect physical function, such as cerebral palsy and ABI may need to have an assessment of essential physical requirements for driving such as:

- control movements and reacting quickly
- joint range of motion and muscle strength
- eye movements

Vehicle modifications, prescribed by a driver trained occupational therapist, can enable some drivers with physical impairment, for example an individual with limb deficiency/amputation, to operate their vehicle. If appropriate, this will be considered during an occupational therapy driving assessment.

Some conditions may affect cognitive (thinking), sensory and physical abilities. All should be considered in relation to their potential impact on driving performance.

## What do I need to do to obtain a learner permit?

If you hope to obtain a learner permit, it is important to discuss the need to report to Medical Review with your doctor and/or a health practitioner who knows you well. If you are in doubt, report to Medical Review so that the Medical Review Team can consider your fitness to drive, including any further assessments, learner permit conditions or supports required to determine your potential to learn to drive safely. (In cases where they need no further contact with you, they will notify you in writing to carry on with your learner permit application/learning to drive.) If your doctor indicates that you should report to medical review, they can make a notification, however it is your responsibility, by law, to ensure that Medical Review is notified about your condition.

When you make a notification to Medical Review, your doctor will need to complete a medical report form for drivers, indicating whether you meet the **National Medical Fitness to Drive Standards**.

An eyesight assessment or other specialist report may also be required. Reports are valid for six months. A link to the online medical report form is available from the Transport Victoria website via the **Health professionals completing medical reviews page**.

If an online medical report form is not easily available to your doctor, a paper medical report form can be downloaded from the same web page.

When you complete the application form for a learner permit, including when using the Learner Permit Test Online, you should tell us about your condition.

When completing the Learner Permit Test Online, ensure that you tick the box that indicates you have a medical condition. You will be contacted in writing by the Medical Review team requesting your medical report if it has not been submitted to them electronically by your doctor.

If you are applying for your learner permit at a VicRoads Customer Service Centre, make an appointment with your doctor prior to your learner permit test.

Take the completed medical/eyesight report to your learner permit appointment. It will then be emailed to Medical Review.

If needed, VicRoads customer service centres can provide support to accommodate your disability when you attempt the Learner Permit Knowledge Test or the Hazard Perception Test – for example, booking an “assisted” test, an interpreter or providing a computer terminal suitable for a person in a wheelchair.

After passing the test, you may be issued with a learner permit or depending on your condition and the medical recommendations, the Medical Review team may advise you of other requirements.

This may include completing an Occupational Therapy (OT) driver assessment. In this case a learner permit with a condition that allows driving with a driving instructor or OT in a dual control car may be issued. This condition may be removed or varied after the assessment.

### What is an OT driver assessment?

After receiving a notification to Medical Review, the Medical Review Team will review the medical report and any additional information they may have received. They may ask you to have an assessment with an occupational therapist (OT) who is qualified in driver assessment.

Some funding schemes (e.g. NDIS) also require OT involvement. If you are not sure whether an OT driving assessment will be beneficial for you, discuss it with your medical practitioner, or a health professional who knows you well.

Occupational therapists (OTs) are health professionals who assist people with physical, psychological, sensory, cognitive (thinking) or intellectual disabilities to maximise their independence in daily living activities.

An OT driver assessor can assess and provide advice about how your physical and cognitive abilities may have an impact on driving or learning to drive. They can also offer advice about potential assistive technology, vehicle modifications or training strategies that might assist you. For some people, this advice can be helpful to determine driving potential before applying for a learner permit.

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Once you have obtained your learner permit, you may be advised by your OT to have a series of driving lessons with a specialised driving instructor prior to a practical on-road driver assessment (driving test).

In this case, the OT will make recommendations to the driving instructor about strategies and adjustments that may support you as you learn to drive. When you are ready for a driving assessment it will occur in a dual control car with the OT and a driving instructor.

The driving instructor will provide directions and ensure the safety of the vehicle's occupants and other road users and the OT will do the driving assessment.

If you have physical disabilities, you may have an assessment with an occupational therapy driving assessor prior to driving lessons, to determine whether you require specialised equipment fitted in the vehicle or strategies to learn to drive.

The OT will send their report with assessment results and recommendations to and your treating doctor.

### Driver licence conditions

Sometimes, a learner driver can commence learning, or drivers can continue to drive with one or more conditions on their licence. These options are only possible if the driver can reasonably be expected to adhere to the condition/s.

Examples include:

- only drive a car with automatic transmission
- only drive in a dual control car with a driving instructor
- only drive in daylight or during offpeak hours
- only drive in familiar areas within a set radius from home
- using specific driver aids or vehicle modifications.

Licence conditions, like those listed above, are determined by Medical Review to help a driver to learn or continue to drive in a way that suits their capabilities.

Depending on your disability or medical conditions, you may be required to have periodical medical or driving tests to monitor your ongoing ability to drive safely. If your condition/s remain stable and you are managed well medically, you may not be required to remain within the Medical Review system.

### Drivers of commercial vehicles

The national medical standards for Fitness to Drive for commercial truck, taxi, driving instructor and bus licences are stricter than those for private/car licences.

### Support

If you have a disability, you may be eligible for support to help you manage your community mobility through schemes such as the National Disability Support Scheme (NDIS) or The Statewide Equipment Program (SWEP).

The NDIS provides eligible Australians under the age of 65 (when commencing in the scheme) who have a permanent and significant disability with reasonable and necessary supports. NDIS participants seeking to explore driver training will need to contact Medical Review prior to applying for a licence or learner permit.

The State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) provides Victorian people who have a permanent or long-term disability with subsidised aids, equipment and home and vehicle modifications to enhance their independence and facilitate community participation.

When considering driving, the support that is available via SWEP focuses on modifications for a vehicle to suit your needs rather than strategies and other practical assistance learning to drive.

Alternatively, supports may be available from other schemes, such as TAC.

## If I can't drive, what other options are there for getting around?

If it is determined that driving is not a safe option for you, you should plan to maintain your personal community mobility independence via other means:

- Discuss personal mobility with your GP; they may refer you to a physiotherapist or OT to review mobility options.
- Other personal mobility devices may be suitable such as a motorised wheelchair or scooter.
- You may be eligible for the multipurpose taxi scheme.
- Develop skills and confidence with using public transport, ride share services or community buses to get to shops, doctor, etc.
- Arrange appointments and visits at times when others can take you.
- Ask about transport rosters (e.g. to get to sporting or other clubs).

## Travellers Aid

Travellers Aid provides support, advice and assistance to those using public transport including people who prefer a support person to accompany them, and those with specific requirements or experiencing travel emergencies. Visit [travellersaid.org.au](http://travellersaid.org.au).

## Where can I get further information about the Medical Review process?

Further information is available on the Transport Victoria website: [transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review](http://transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review)

## Medical Review

**Email** [medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au](mailto:medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au)

**Call** (03) 8391 3226

**Fax** (03) 9854 2307

**Mail** Medical Review  
GPO Box 2392, Melbourne  
Victoria 3001

## Find out more



If you have any questions please email us at [medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au](mailto:medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au) or visit our website and search 'Medical conditions and review'.

**Call:** (03) 8391 3226

**Web:** [transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review](http://transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review)



Language Loop (formerly Victorian Interpreting & Translating Services - VITS) call (03) 9280 0783, then ask for 13 11 71.