Driving and mental illness

You have to tell the Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if you have certain mental illnesses or take some medication. This factsheet explains how and when to tell the DVLA about your illness or medication. It explains what could happen when you tell the DVLA and how to challenge a decision if you think it is wrong.

- Having a mental illness does not always mean you cannot drive safely. But some drivers need to take extra care or may become too unwell to drive.
- There are some illnesses that you have to tell the DVLA about.
- The DVLA will use the information you give them to decide if you should keep your licence.
- They may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment.
- Sometimes they can give you a licence that is valid for 1 to 3 years.
- Sometimes they will take your licence away (‘revoke’ it). You can appeal.
- If your doctor says you are not fit to drive, you can give up (‘surrender’) your licence. You can reapply for it when your condition has improved.
- If you continue to drive when your doctor says you shouldn’t, this could affect your insurance policy.

This factsheet covers:
1. Who should I tell if my illness affects my driving?
2. How do I tell the DVLA?
3. When would I give up my driving licence?
4. What happens after I tell the DVLA?
5. What happens if I do not tell the DVLA?
6. What if my medication affects my driving?
7. How can I challenge a decision?
8. What if I am in an accident?
1. Who should I tell if my illness affects my driving?

Your doctor
The first step is to talk to your doctor about your illness to see if they think it will cause a problem with driving.

If you agree, your doctor might talk to your carer, relatives or friends about your driving.

If your doctor thinks you should stop driving but you refuse, they could tell the DVLA without your consent.¹

Your insurance company
Your insurance cover could be affected if you drive when your doctor tells you not to. You should check your policy to see what it says.

The DVLA
There are rules about many illnesses and disabilities. But this factsheet will only look at mental illnesses. You can find the rules on other illnesses by searching the pages at www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving.

If you have any of the conditions below and you are going to drive you must tell the Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).²

- Severe anxiety or depression with significant memory and concentration problems, agitation, behavioural disturbance or suicidal thoughts
- Hypomania or mania (which can be symptoms of bipolar disorder and schizoaffective disorder)
- Acute psychotic disorder
- Schizophrenia or long-lasting psychosis
- Personality disorders³

You should tell the DVLA if you have any of these conditions when you are applying for a licence. If you already have a licence, you should tell the DVLA right away and do not wait for your renewal date.

You do not need to tell the DVLA if you have mild or moderate anxiety or depression which is under control and does not:

- affect your memory or concentration,
- make you feel agitated or irritated a lot of the time,
- affect your behaviour, or
- give you suicidal thoughts.
2. How do I tell the DVLA?

If you already have a licence, you need to complete a medical questionnaire. You can download the form from [www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving](http://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving) by searching for your condition. You can call the DVLA to ask them to send it to you. You need to fill out a form to give your agreement for the DVLA’s doctors to contact your doctor or a specialist.

You can post, fax or email these forms back to:

**Address:** Drivers Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1DF  
**Telephone:** 0300 790 6806 (Mon to Fri - 8am to 5.30pm, Sat – 8am to 1pm)  
**Fax:** 0845 850 0095  
**Email:** via [www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla](http://www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla)

If the form gives a different address, you should send it to the address on the form.

The DVLA will try to decide if you are well enough to drive based on the information you send them. They may contact your doctor if you have agreed to this. They may ask you to have a medical assessment or to do a driving assessment.

You might be applying for a new licence or renewing a licence. You must tell the DVLA if you have or have ever had any of the conditions listed on the application form. You will then fill out the medical enquiry form as described above.

You must let the DVLA know if your illness changes or if you get a new diagnosis.

3. When would I give up my driving licence?

If your doctor has told you not to drive, you may give up your licence. This is called ‘surrendering’ your licence. If you do this the DVLA does not need to assess your fitness to drive.

If you surrender your licence, you can reapply for it when your doctor thinks your condition has improved. In this case, you can drive again as soon as the DVLA get your application. The DVLA will then decide if you should continue to drive.

If you don’t surrender your licence and the DVLA thinks you are too unwell to drive, they will take your licence away or refuse to give you a licence. In some situations, it may make it easier for you to get your licence back in the future if you surrender it.

You can download the 'Declaration of Voluntary Surrender' –from [www.gov.uk/giving-up-your-driving-licence](http://www.gov.uk/giving-up-your-driving-licence). You can ask the DVLA to send you a copy of this form. The contact details are below.
4. What happens after I tell the DVLA?

As long as you give the DVLA full information, they may make a decision in three weeks. It can take up to 90 days if:

- they need more information from you, your doctor or other people, or
- if you’re applying for a bus or lorry licence.

The DVLA can do the following.

- Let you keep your licence or give you a new one
- Give you a licence that is valid for 1, 2 or 3 years
- Take away (revoke) your licence or refuse your application. This will happen if the DVLA does not feel you are fit to drive at the moment. In this case, they will explain their decision and give you advice on when you can reapply. They should send you a notice explaining how you can appeal their decision.

The medical standards the DVLA use will be different depending on what type of vehicle you want to drive. The standards are higher for larger vehicles. The DVLA will decide based on how your symptoms affect your driving.

The information below outlines the guidance for an ordinary car or motorcycle licence.

**Severe uncontrolled anxiety or depression**

You should stop driving until the DVLA makes a decision. You will need to be stable before you can start driving again. How long you need to be stable for depends on your circumstances.

**Acute psychotic disorders of any type**

You must stop driving when you are unwell. The DVLA will consider letting you drive again when:

- you have been well and stable for at least 3 months,
- you agree to treatment,
- you don’t have any side effects from medication that impact your driving, and
- your doctor gives them a report that says you are well enough to drive.
Mania or hypomania
Mania is a symptom of bipolar disorder. You must stop driving when you are unwell. If you have had an episode of hypomania or mania, the DVLA may let you to drive again when:

- you have been well and stable for at least 3 months,
- you agree to treatment,
- you understand your condition,
- you don’t have any side effects from medication that impact your driving, and
- your doctor gives them a report that says you are well enough to drive.

You need to be stable for at least 6 months before the DVLA will give you a licence if you have 4 of more periods of mania or hypomania in 12 months.

Long-lasting psychosis or schizophrenia
You must:

- have stayed well and stable for at least 3 months,
- agree to treatment,
- not have any side effects from medication that impact your driving, and
- have a report from your doctor that says you are well enough to drive.

If you have ongoing symptoms, this does not mean that you can’t have a licence. But to have a licence, your ongoing symptoms must be unlikely to cause problems:

- with your concentration,
- with your memory, or
- that would distract you while driving.

Personality disorders
The DVLA will decide if your behaviour affects your road safety. If it does then it is likely that you would not be able to have your driving licence.

Other illnesses
If you have any other mental illness that affects your ability to drive safely, you need to tell the DVLA.

Other vehicles
Contact the DVLA for information on driving the following vehicles.

- Taxi
- Heavy goods vehicle
5. What happens if I don’t tell the DVLA?

It is illegal not to tell the DVLA that you have one of the above illnesses if it has lasted, or will last, more than 3 months.⁹ If you do not tell the DVLA and keep driving you could get a fine, especially if you cause an accident.

6. What if my medication affects my driving?

Medication and alertness

Some medications can affect your alertness and concentration. This can affect how you drive. You may notice this more at the start of treatment or after increasing the dose. If your medication has a big effect on you, it is important to stop driving during this time.⁹

It is illegal to drive when unfit because of drugs.¹⁰ This includes prescription medication. If you drive when your medication makes this unsafe, the police could charge you with an offence.

Specific medications

It is an offence to drive with certain drugs in your bloodstream.¹¹,¹² This includes medications for mental illnesses, other medications and illegal drugs.

- Some benzodiazepines - Diazepam, Lorazepam, Temazepam, Clonazepam, Oxazepam and Flunitrazepam.
- Some painkillers - Morphine, Diamorphine and Ketamine
- Methadone
- Amphetamine
- Cannabis
- Cocaine¹³

If you take these drugs and drive, you could be committing an offence if you have more than the limit in your blood. Police can test you at roadside. This is called a field impairment assessment.¹⁴ They can ask you to go to a police station for a blood test.

There is a “medical defence” if you can show:¹⁵

- you were prescribed the medication for a medical problem,
- you are taking the medication as directed by your medical professionals, and
- the medication does not affect your ability to drive.
Different medications may affect your driving in different ways. Further information on this is set out below.16

**Benzodiazepines**
Benzodiazepines can make you tired and can affect how quickly you can react to something unexpected. For example if someone in front of you hits their breaks suddenly, this medication may mean you don’t react in time and run into the back of them.

**Antipsychotics**
Antipsychotics may make you tired, and can make your vision blurred. They can also slow down how quickly you can react and make it harder to concentrate.17

**Antidepressants**
Some antidepressants can affect your driving. They can make you tired, make your vision blurred and make you dizzy.18 More recent antidepressants do not have as many side effects and may not impact on your driving as much.19 You should talk to your doctor about the antidepressants you are taking and if they may affect your driving.

**Anticonvulsants**
If you have seizures and you stop taking anticonvulsant medication, you need to stop driving. Withdrawal can affect your driving and increase the risk of having a seizure when you’re driving.20

**Lithium**
Lithium can cause drowsiness and confusion when you first take it. This may affect how quickly you react when driving.21 There is some evidence that it can affect your ability to see in dark conditions.22

**Other medicines**
Some medicines may cause drowsiness or affect driving ability.23 For example antihistamines or sleeping remedies may affect your driving. It is important is read the label or ask the pharmacist about possible side effects.

Go to [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) for more information on these topics.

- Antipsychotics
- Antidepressants
- Mood Stabilisers
- Benzodiazepines
- Medication – Choice and managing problems

Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy.
7. How can I challenge a decision?

If you disagree with your doctor

If your doctor thinks that you shouldn’t drive, you can ask for a second opinion about your fitness to drive. Try to get a second opinion as soon as you can. You should try to get a second opinion before the DVLA makes a decision based on your doctor’s opinion.

After the DVLA has made a decision

If the DVLA says you are not fit to drive and you don’t agree, you can try to challenge this. The quickest and easiest way is to send more evidence from a doctor.

It is best to try to resolve the issue without going to court. But you can appeal to your local magistrates’ court within 6 months of the DVLA’s decision. This can be expensive and time consuming, and you may not be successful.

If you want to go to court, the first step is to contact your local magistrates’ court for information on how you do it. You can find your nearest court by searching online at http://hmcts courtfinder.justice.gov.uk/HMCTS/. You need to tell the DVLA that you are appealing and you may want to get independent legal advice.

8. What should I do if I am in an accident?

You may find you are in an accident and not sure what you should do. If you, someone else, an animal or property were injured or damaged you should stay at the scene. If you have caused the accident, or not, you should follow the same steps. The law that explains what you have to do is the Road Traffic Act 1991.

1. Turn off your engine and turn on your hazard lights
2. If you are on the motorway or a busy main road get out of your vehicle and move to a safe place. This might be onto the central reservation or the hard shoulder. Don’t do this if you are injured already as it may make your injuries worse.
3. Call an ambulance or police if anyone is injured or the accident is blocking traffic.
4. Give your name, address and vehicle registration number to the other person in the accident and anyone else who it is at the scene who asks for it. These other people may be police or emergency service staff.
5. You need to report to the police station if:
   a. anyone is injured,
   b. there is damage and the other driver or rider did not stop, or
   c. there is damage and names and addresses were not exchanged with the other driver, rider or cyclist and any other owner of property damaged (even if the other driver stopped). Any other owner of property damaged might be a wall outside their house or their fence.
6. If you do not give your details at the scene you should report it to the police station within 24 hours of the accident. You should do this as soon as you can after the accident. You need to go to the police station in person and not just call them.

7. You should make notes of what happened. Take photos of the cars and the accident scene. Get details of people who may have seen what happened. Make a note of anything that might have made the accident likely to happen. These things may be the weather, obstacles on the road, cyclists or people walking.

8. If the police think that medication has affected your driving they will do a field impairment test.

9. If the police are involved you should speak to a solicitor before you speak to the police.

Citizens Advice
They give free, confidential and independent advice on many different issues and areas of law. You can find your local office on their website.

Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/?gclid=CKLP8teZ08qCFYhAGwodrikFrQ](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/?gclid=CKLP8teZ08qCFYhAGwodrikFrQ)

The Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency
They give information about applying for a licence and guidelines that apply to people with medical conditions wishing to drive.

Website: [www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/](http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/)

**General Enquiries**

**Address:** Drivers Customer Services
Correspondence Team, DVLA, Swansea
SA6 7JL
**Telephone:** 0300 790 6801 (Open 8:00am-7:00pm Mon-Fri, 8:00am-2:00pm Sat)

**Medical Enquiries**

**Address:** Drivers Medical Group, DVLA
Swansea, SA99 1TU

**Telephone:** 0300 790 6806 (Open 8:00am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:00am-1:00pm Sat)
**Email:** eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk


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2. Road Traffic Act 1988, Sections 92 & 94

6 As note 3
7 As note 5
8 As note 2, s94(3)
9 As note 3
10 As note 2, s4
11 The Drug Driving (Specified Limits) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2015
14 As note 1
19 As note 16
20 As note 3 pg 33
22 As note 1
23 As note 3 pg 6
24 As note 2, s100
Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927
Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?
We’d love to know if this information
helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:
RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We’re open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)

Need more help?
Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits
and your rights.

Don’t have access to the web?
Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday
to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the
information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?
If you need practical advice, call us on 0300
5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday
to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you
with queries like how to apply for benefits, get
access to care or make a complaint.

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