

Information Update

October 2019

Guide to occupational therapy driver assessment

This information sheet is a guide to the occupational therapy driver assessment process and what it means for you.

Occupational therapy driver assessment

Sometimes impairments associated with medical conditions, injuries and disabilities can influence how well you drive.

VicRoads may at any time ask you to have an occupational therapy driver assessment to show that you can drive safely. Even if you are an experienced driver, you may be asked to have this assessment.

The role of occupational therapists

Occupational therapists are health professionals who assist people with physical, mental or intellectual disabilities to resume normal daily activities. Some occupational therapists have additional qualifications, which allow them to help their clients either obtain a driver licence or maintain their ability to drive safely.

Victorian law allows a registered occupational therapist to conduct a driver assessment. Occupational therapists, like doctors or optometrists, are independent specialists working in the field of health care. They do not work for, and are not paid by VicRoads.

Why are we assessing your fitness to drive?

An assessment may be necessary because:

- you have a medical condition(s) or disability and would like to know if you are able to obtain or retain a driver licence

- a physical injury, head injury, illness, disability, stroke, psychiatric condition or medication may have affected your ability to drive safely
- your physical skills or thinking abilities, such as your memory or speed of thinking, may have changed since you first obtained your licence
- some people require an assessment because they are subject to ongoing reviews to monitor a deteriorating medical condition
- other people who have failed an on-road test for an unconditional licence may be eligible to be retested for a conditional licence.

How will VicRoads make a decision about your fitness to drive?

VicRoads is required by law to assess your fitness to drive using the Assessing fitness to drive guidelines. These guidelines outline the medical requirements needed to drive in Australia, and are based on expert medical opinion and research.

How do I arrange an assessment?

VicRoads will contact you and provide a list of registered occupational therapy driver assessors. Your chosen occupational therapist will then arrange an assessment.

If you no longer wish to continue driving, you can advise VicRoads in writing and enclose your driver licence/ learner permit card. You may also request a refund of any unused part of your driver licence fee (not applicable for learner permits).

Can I choose my occupational therapist?

Yes. You can contact your local hospital, medical centre or community health centre.

A list of registered occupational therapy driver assessors is also on our website at vicroads.vic.gov.au.

VicRoads does not endorse or approve any occupational therapist included on the list.

Can I have the test in my own car?

No. The test is conducted in a driving instructor's car with controls on both the driver's and passenger's side. This is used to ensure safety for the vehicle occupants and other road users.

How much will the assessment cost?

The occupational therapy driver assessment is in two parts: an off-road assessment and an on-road test.

Costs may vary depending on factors such as how long the assessment takes and costs associated with driving instructors.

In some cases, assessments may be partly or fully paid by an insurance scheme (e.g. TAC, WorkSafe) or through rehabilitation services. The cost of the assessment is not covered by Medicare or VicRoads.

VicRoads has no discretion over fees charged by occupational therapists. As occupational therapists are independent from VicRoads, fees may vary, therefore, you should discuss costs prior to proceeding with an assessment.

What does the assessment involve?

1 A medical assessment

You will be asked to provide a current fitness to drive medical and/or eyesight report from your own doctor or specialist.

Standards for commercial truck, taxi and bus licences are stricter than those for private licences.

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2 Occupational therapy off-road assessment

The occupational therapist will ask you about your driving and medical history, test your understanding of road law, and assess your physical, visual, sensory and thinking abilities.

This assessment evaluates your functional limitations, your understanding of safe driving, the need for vehicle modifications or licence conditions, and determines the requirements for your on-road test, e.g.:

- vehicle type (e.g. automatic or manual)
- any vehicle modifications
- where the test should be conducted.

If you have any specific driving needs you should mention them to the assessor before your assessment commences.

3 Occupational therapy on-road assessment

The test will occur in a dual controlled car with a driving instructor and the occupational therapist. The instructor maintains the safety of the vehicle and provides directions. It will take about an hour and a half (of which up to one hour will involve driving).

Many aspects of driving are assessed including:

- physical limitations
- judgement and ability to adjust to traffic situations
- reacting appropriately to traffic
- abiding with road laws.
- completing driving tasks despite distractions (e.g. conversations in the car).

If vehicle modifications are required (e.g. steering aid, left foot accelerator), the equipment is fitted and driving lessons may be required to ensure you can safely use modifications.

Your assessment outcomes

If your assessment is satisfactory you may be able to resume driving:

- unconditionally (retain full privileges) or
- with modifications to your car, and/or
- with restrictions or conditions to your driving.

If you can show that you can drive safely, but only under certain conditions, a conditional licence may be considered.

A wide range of conditions are possible. Driving conditions are aimed at maximising your safety and that of other road users. They include wearing corrective lenses, driving automatic vehicles or a specially modified vehicle, driving in daylight hours only or in certain areas.

VicRoads will make the final decision regarding your licence status.

If you are found unsafe to drive:

- you may be asked to take driving lessons to improve your skills or to familiarise yourself with vehicle modifications. You may be required to have a further on-road test after you have completed these lessons
- you may be asked to wait for further recovery or improvement to occur
- you may be found not safe to continue or to resume driving or riding a motorcycle at this point in time.

What if I hold a heavy vehicle licence?

Passing an assessment in a car does not mean that you are automatically allowed to drive a heavy vehicle or ride a motorcycle. This is because the standard required for heavy vehicles is more stringent, and different skills are required to ride a motorcycle. VicRoads will let you know if a separate heavy vehicle and/or motorcycle assessment is required.

What to bring to your occupational therapy assessment?

- Your driver licence or learner permit card.
- Your corrective lenses and/or hearing aids if you wear them for reading or driving.
- Any cushions, back supports or other equipment you need to use to drive.
- A list of all the medicines you take.
- Payment for the assessment (if necessary and as arranged by the occupational therapist).
- Any relevant correspondence from VicRoads.

What if I have questions about how my assessment was conducted or about the recommendations?

In the first instance, you may review this brochure then, if required, contact the occupational therapist who assessed you to discuss any concerns.

If you are still not sure about the assessment or medical review process, contact VicRoads Medical Review on (03) 8391 3226.

What if my licence is varied, suspended or cancelled?

VicRoads may suspend or cancel your licence, or may not be able to issue you with a licence because your driving is found to be unsafe. To be reconsidered as 'fit to drive', you will need to have another occupational therapy driver assessment. The occupational therapy driver assessor will make a recommendation to VicRoads, who will make a decision regarding your licence. You may also need to provide another medical fitness to drive report.

If you disagree with the test outcome you may request an independent assessment by another registered occupational therapy driver assessor. If VicRoads varies, suspends or cancels your licence you can appeal against the decision. However, you cannot appeal if VicRoads requests you to provide a medical or other report, or asks you to undertake a driving test.

You may also:

- Write to VicRoads and ask for an independent internal review.
- Appeal directly to the Magistrates' Court.

The VicRoads notice of suspension or cancellation will provide you with advice on your legal rights.

Where can I find further information?

Further information can be obtained by:

Email medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Call (03) 8391 3226 (TTY users call 13 36 77, Speak and Listen users call 1300 555 727).

Web vicroads.vic.gov.au

Post VicRoads Medical Review
PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

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