

Learning to drive with a disability

Road Safety and Medical Review

VicRoads' 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: having a disability needn't be a barrier to driving.

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 their conditions and to discuss potential impacts on driving.

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

Each person is reviewed by VicRoads Medical Review to determine their fitness to drive (according to national medical Fitness to Drive standards) and the outcome that is best for the safety of the individual and the community.

The purpose of this factsheet is to provide information about applying for a learner permit and how some conditions may affect capacity to drive. Some conditions may be present from birth, such as attention deficit disorder (ADD),

autism spectrum disorder (ASD) cerebral palsy and some intellectual impairments. Other conditions such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) or stroke may have been acquired prior to the age limit 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:

- vision
- 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 disabilities which may impact driving. This factsheet provides information on some of the issues that may affect driving. Some conditions like ASD, ADD or TBI affect cognitive or thinking abilities 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)
- information processing and judgement
- the ability to anticipate and respond to other road user behaviour.

Other conditions like cerebral palsy may also affect physical function such as:

- difficulty controlling movement
- reduced joint range of motion and muscle strength
- eye movements

Some conditions may affect both cognitive and physical abilities.

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

If you hope to obtain a learner permit, your doctor will need to complete a VicRoads medical report form for drivers, indicating that you meet the National Medical Standards. An eyesight assessment or other specialist report may also be required. Reports are valid for 6 months and the relevant VicRoads forms can be downloaded from vicroads.vic.gov.au. Take the completed medical/eyesight report to your learner permit appointment. It will then be emailed to VicRoads medical review.

When you complete the application form for a learner permit, you should disclose your condition. 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, VicRoads will advise you of other requirements, such as completing an OT driver assessment. A learner permit with a temporary condition to allow driving with a driving instructor or OT in a dual control car may be issued. This condition may be removed or varied by the OT after the assessment.

What is an OT driver assessment?

VicRoads recommends that people with a disability or medical condition with functional issues affecting activities of daily living should have an assessment with an occupational therapist (OT) qualified in driver assessment. Some funding schemes (e.g. NDIS) also require OT involvement.

OTs are health professionals who assist people with physical, mental 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 impact on driving or learning to drive. They can also offer advice about potential aids, 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.

Learning to drive with a disability

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. This assessment 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.

Alternatively, if you have physical disabilities, you may complete the on-road assessment prior to driving lessons, to determine whether you require specialised equipment or strategies to learn to drive.

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

Driver licence conditions

Sometimes, a learner driver can commence or 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 off-peak hours
- only drive in familiar areas within a set radius from home
- using specific driver aids or vehicle modifications.

Through licence conditions, VicRoads can 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 VicRoads Medical Review system.

Drivers of commercial vehicles

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

Support

If you have a disability, support options to help you manage community mobility independence may be available through schemes such as the National Disability Support Scheme (NDIS) or The State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP).

The NDIS provides all Australians under the age of 65 who have a permanent and significant disability with reasonable and necessary supports. NDIS recipients 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.

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

If you have a severe disability which precludes you from driving, 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 e.g. motorised wheelchair or scooter.
- You may be eligible for the multi-purpose 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 the travelling public including people with special requirements or experiencing travel emergencies.

Where can I get further information about the medical review process?

Further information is available on the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au or by calling VicRoads on 13 11 71 (TTY 13 36 77, Speak and Listen 1300 555 727).

VicRoads Medical Review

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