

Vision and driving

October 2020

Some medical and eyesight conditions may affect the ability to drive safely. VicRoads Medical Review aims to support drivers to drive at any age so long as they are medically fit to do so.

Good eyesight is essential for driving in order to see and respond to the road and adjacent environment, including other vehicles, signs, signals, pedestrians and hazards.

Good vision is particularly important to safely complete manoeuvres such as lane changing, merging and negotiating intersections.

This fact sheet provides information about your vision and driving, including:

- The importance of regular eyesight checks
- Common eye conditions and how vision impairment impacts safe driving
- How the VicRoads Medical Review process supports you in managing your vision in relation to driving
- Where to get more information about eye conditions and the Medical Review process.

More information is available on the VicRoads website and in VicRoads fact sheets covering:

- Cataracts
- Macular degeneration
- Glaucoma
- Diabetes (including diabetic retinopathy)

The following images provided by the Vision Initiative are indicative of possible changes to vision associated with some conditions compared with normal vision.



Full healthy vision



Age-related macular degeneration



Diabetic retinopathy



Cataracts



Glaucoma

Early action improves sight and safety

Changes in vision can occur at any age and are also a normal part of ageing. For example, night vision gradually deteriorates from about 40 years of age. Eye conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration are also more common as we age.

Regular eye checks are therefore essential, particularly as you get older. This enables early detection and treatment of eye conditions and optimises your ability to have good vision and drive for as long as possible.

For most people, eye checks are recommended every 2 years. Yearly checks are recommended for people over 65 years of age. More frequent testing may also be required depending on your specific health condition(s).

If you notice any sudden changes in vision between your regular checks, you should see your eye health professional as soon as possible.

What does good eyesight mean?

There are several aspects of eyesight that contribute to good vision and are important for safe driving.

Visual acuity

Visual acuity describes the sharpness or clarity of your vision and is measured by how well you can read letters on a standard eye chart from a specific distance.

You need to be able to meet the thresholds set out in the national medical standards, with or without corrective lenses, to meet the visual standards for driving. (*Assessing Fitness to Drive Guidelines, Austroads 2016*).

Visual acuity is affected by conditions such as myopia (short sightedness), cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.

Visual fields

The term visual fields refers to the area you can see when your head is still and includes your central and peripheral (side) vision in each eye.

Visual field testing maps any areas of vision loss and can detect blind spots or areas of dim vision resulting from an eye injury or medical conditions such as stroke, brain injury or glaucoma.

If the loss is severe, you may not meet the national eyesight standards to drive. Detailed visual field testing can only be assessed by some eye health professionals using specialised equipment.

Contrast sensitivity

Contrast sensitivity refers to your ability to distinguish detail against a background. Reduced contrast sensitivity is common with ageing and can be a symptom of cataracts, glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy. It can make it difficult to see in low light, such as when driving at night.

Eye movements

Eye movements enable your eyes to track and fixate on objects. Some conditions such as stroke or brain injury can affect eye movements resulting in impaired vision such as double vision.

Depth perception

When driving, depth perception enables you to judge distances between objects such as vehicles. It relies on the brain receiving information from both eyes, therefore loss of vision in one eye results in difficulty with depth perception. It can take a few months to adjust to these changes. Your eye health professional can assist with compensation techniques to transition back to driving.

What do you need to do if you have impaired vision?

It is important to speak to your doctor or eye health professional early on so that you understand your condition and the potential impacts. For driving, you will appreciate that the potential for harm to yourself and others on the road is increased, so you might ask about:

- How your condition currently impacts on driving
- What might be long-term impacts on driving
- How often eyes and vision should be checked
- Whether transitioning to not driving in the future will be required
- Where you can get more information
- Notifying VicRoads about your diagnosis.

All Victorian drivers are required by law to notify VicRoads if they have a long-term, chronic health condition or disability that could affect their ability to drive safely. This includes eye conditions such as myopia, glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and loss of vision in one eye. It also includes medical conditions that may affect vision such as diabetes and stroke.

Notifying VicRoads Medical Review is simple. Ask your eye health professional to complete and submit a VicRoads eyesight form. Keep a record of this report.

Alternatively, you can notify VicRoads by phone, email, fax or mail using the contact details below.

What happens at Medical Review?

Once you notify Medical Review, you will be asked to provide a report from your eye health professional (if not already submitted). A medical report from your treating doctor may also be required. The Medical Review team will review the report/s and make a decision about your driving based on the national medical standards (*Assessing Fitness to Drive, Austroads 2016*), which include vision and eye disorder standards for driving.

Most people who report to VicRoads soon after their diagnosis continue to drive, but with requirements such as regular eyesight reviews.

What is a conditional licence?

Conditional licences permit driving under circumstances that suit the capacity of the driver. For example, with some vision conditions, you may

be able to continue to drive with restrictions such as:

- Wearing corrective lenses
- Driving only in daylight hours
- Driving only in local familiar areas
- Having regular vision reviews with your eye health professional to check that your vision continues to meet the required standards.

This approach enables driving for as long as you are safe to do so. It also helps you to plan for when you may no longer be safe to drive.

VicRoads will contact you to advise you of the Medical Review outcome, next steps or to request further information.

Drivers of commercial vehicles

Due to the nature of their work, drivers of commercial vehicles such as trucks, taxis, hire cars and buses are required to meet stricter visual standards than private vehicle drivers.

Sometimes a driver with an eyesight condition may not be able to drive a commercial vehicle, while still being able to drive a private car. Your eye health professional and the VicRoads Medical Review team will provide case by case advice.

Where can you get more information?

VicRoads Medical Review

Website: vicroads.vic.gov.au
Email: medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 8391 3226 or VicRoads on 13 11 71 (TTY 13 36 77, Speak and Listen 1300 555 727).
Fax: (03) 9854 2307
Mail: Medical Review, PO Box 2504, Kew VIC

Glaucoma Australia

Website: www.glaucoma.org.au
Email: glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au
Phone: 1800 500 880

Macular Disease Foundation Australia

Website: www.mdfoundation.com.au
Email: info@mdfoundation.com.au
Phone: 1800 111 709

Vision2020 Australia

<https://www.vision2020australia.org.au/>

Vision Initiative

www.visioninitiative.org.au/

Good Vision For Life:

<https://goodvisionforlife.com.au>