

## Am I still fit to drive?

# Your health and driving

**All drivers, no matter what age, should routinely consider 'am I still fit to drive?'**

This factsheet outlines how your health, any disabilities you have and medications you take may have an impact on your driving and the VicRoads medical review process.

Many health problems occur gradually, and can be difficult to notice. It is important to have regular check-ups with your doctor to help keep track of your health and identify any issues which might have an impact on your driving.

Eyesight changes occur as we age; regular eye tests are important to ensure eye problems are detected early to prevent avoidable vision loss. Eye tests can be arranged through a registered optometrist, by referral to an ophthalmologist, or by speaking to your doctor.

**All drivers have a legal obligation to consider fitness to drive and to report relevant conditions or disabilities to VicRoads.**



Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have any serious or chronic medical conditions, injuries or disabilities (or the effects of treatment for any of those things), you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact VicRoads to report your condition
- send VicRoads a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.



## Warning signs

Below is a list of signs to watch out for, which may indicate that it is time to talk to a doctor and possibly reduce or stop driving:

- difficulty seeing street signs, road markings and other road users
- damaging the vehicle more often, from colliding with posts, fences, etc.
- difficulty parking or incidents of 'touch' parking
- difficulty staying within the lane markings—such as driving in the gravel on the side of the road, driving down the centre of the road, or failing to drive within a single lane
- feeling anxious or difficulty coping with changed conditions like road works
- slow decision-making or reaction times; e.g. not reacting to traffic lights
- sensitivity to sun glare or the glare from car or street lights when driving at night
- mobility issues—such as hand, leg or back problems that affect your ability to control the foot pedals, steering wheel and dash board controls
- lack of judgement of distances such as driving too close to other cars
- confusion—such as driving in the wrong direction on the road
- memory problems—such as forgetting where you're going or where you've left the car
- finding it difficult to concentrate
- mixing up the accelerator and brake pedals
- friends and family members preferring not to travel in your car
- failing to observe traffic lights, stop signs, give way signs and roundabout signs
- not using your indicators
- slowing or stopping without reason in a lane of traffic
- being tooted by other drivers.

### **If you have identified any of these warning signs in your own driving, these are the next steps you should take:**

- Make an appointment to see your doctor and/or your eye health professional to talk to them about your driving.
- Complete the **self-assessment guide in the *Aging and safe driving* factsheet, available on the VicRoads website.**
- Consider lessons from the RACV *Senior driving program* (telephone 1300 788 229). These refresher lessons offer practical solutions to help drivers maintain mobility and give you independent, objective feedback on your driving ability.

## Your diagnosis and your drivers licence

It is important to ask your doctor for advice about the effect that any illness, disability or medical condition may have on your ability to drive safely. This includes the effects of any medicines you may be taking, and the effects of medical treatment.

Your doctor should apply the national Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD) guidelines.

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*All Victorian licence holders have a legal responsibility to report any serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, medical condition or injury (or the effects of treatment for any of those things) to VicRoads.*

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Being diagnosed with a health condition doesn't necessarily mean that you must stop driving straight away. You may have conditions put on your licence to enable you to drive only in conditions that suit your capabilities—for example, limits on distance travelled or being restricted to local roads, only driving in daylight or off-peak hours, and/or a requirement to undergo routine medical or eyesight reviews.

**Medical diagnosis, conditions or disabilities that may require reporting to VicRoads.**

People with any of the following conditions or impairments should talk to their doctor about their fitness to drive. In some instances, diagnosis alone requires the driver to report their condition to VicRoads.

- diabetes
- dementia
- stroke
- epilepsy or seizures
- multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson's disease
- reduced vision or eye disease (cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetes)
- heart disease or heart conditions (including pacemakers)
- arthritic conditions causing pain and reduced mobility
- sleep apnoea
- hearing loss
- psychiatric conditions (including depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, manic depressive disorder)
- head or brain injury (especially with loss of consciousness)
- reduced or loss of function in limbs.

## Medical Review

Once you have notified VicRoads of your medical condition or disability, VicRoads may undertake a medical review. In this process, the medical report from your doctor or other health professional will be reviewed. If you don't have a medical report, we may request that you ask a doctor who is familiar with your medical history to complete one. Any costs associated with the medical report and health appointments are not covered by VicRoads.

Once you've notified VicRoads of a medical condition or disability, it's important to keep your address up to date. We will likely send you letters keeping you updated about the medical review. If you move house, you must update your address within 14 days – you can do this online, over the phone, or at a Customer Service Centre.

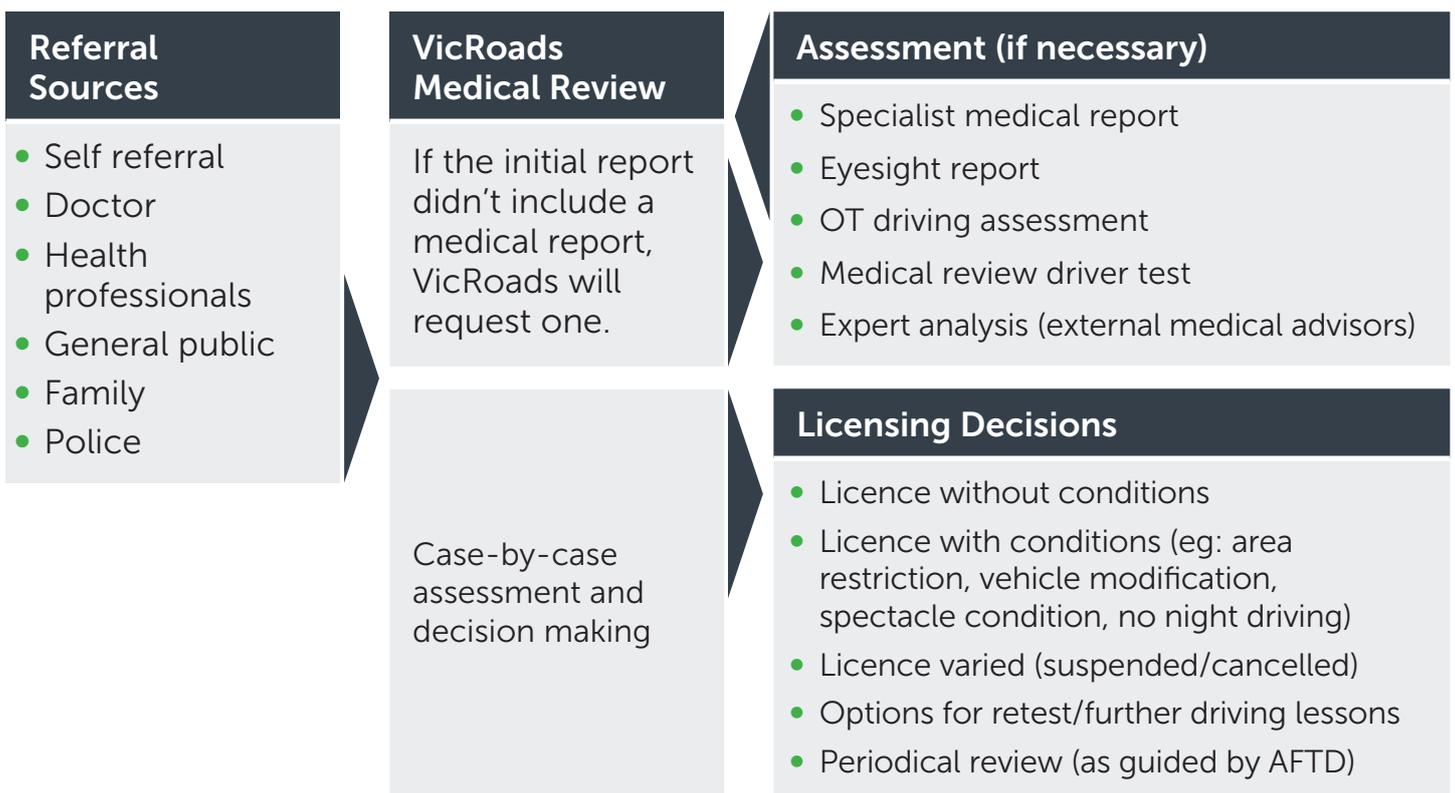
VicRoads assesses each medical report on a case-by-case basis. If you are given a medical diagnosis, or have a condition or disability that can affect your driving, VicRoads may ask you to do a driver assessment with an Occupational Therapy Driver Assessor. You are responsible for the cost associated with this assessment. VicRoads will write to you if you are required to have one of these assessments. This request may have been recommended by your doctor, Victoria Police, or by someone else who has reasonable concern over your ability to drive safely.

If your assessment shows you can drive safely, you will keep your driver licence/learner permit. However, depending on the assessment results, you may have specific conditions placed on your licence—for example, you may be limited to driving in daylight hours, or only around your neighbourhood.

VicRoads will only suspend or cancel your driver licence/learner permit if you:

- are assessed as medically unfit to drive
- fail a driving assessment
- do not provide a medical report upon request
- refuse or fail to undergo a test.

On the VicRoads website, you can find an information bulletin about Medical Review driver assessments and frequently asked questions about assessing fitness to drive.



## Medications and driving

By age 75, more than three quarters of us are taking two or more medicines regularly and some of these can affect our fitness to drive. This can happen with medicines prescribed by a doctor and those bought without a prescription, such as cold and flu or hay fever medication.

To drive safely:

- you should never mix alcohol, medication and driving
- read your medicine labels carefully and obey the directions and warnings; they are there for your protection
- ask your doctor or pharmacist if medicines will affect driving, and if they do, ask if there are options for medicines that don't
- if you are likely to be affected by medicines, take public transport, a taxi, or ask a friend or relative to drive
- take your medicine exactly as directed.

A pharmacist can advise how any new medicine can interact with others you are taking. Note that impairing effects vary depending on the medicine type, your age and the dose. Always ask if it's safe to drive when taking your medicines.

Early symptoms of being affected by medicines include:

- drowsiness
- undue aggression
- dizziness
- nausea
- light-headedness
- blurred or double vision
- shakiness.



# MARJ'S STORY

Six months ago Marj had a stroke. With rehabilitation support from physiotherapists and occupational therapists, she is making a good recovery and is returning to an active life again, although her right leg is slightly less coordinated and she becomes more tired than previously. She also takes medication to reduce the risk of having another stroke. Just after the stroke, Marj was advised by her doctor that she should not drive due to the effects of the stroke.

Her doctor said it was her responsibility to report the stroke to VicRoads as it may affect her ability to drive safely. Marj was worried about this, fearing that she would lose her licence for good, but she understood it was her obligation. Her doctor filled out the VicRoads medical report and Marj sent it in to the VicRoads Medical Review team. She received a letter back advising that her licence had been suspended until she could provide medical evidence that she had recovered enough to be considered for a driver assessment. Marj's doctor completed another medical report to say that she was medically fit to return to driving, but she should have an occupational therapy driver assessment to see whether the reduced coordination in her right leg and her increased tiredness affected her driving.

During the driving assessment with the occupational therapist, the slightly reduced coordination in her right leg did not affect her ability to accelerate and brake safely and she was able to concentrate well for the assessment without getting tired. She therefore passed the driving assessment but decided to have a couple of driving lessons to boost her confidence about being back on the road.



## Quick links for further information

<b>VicRoads website</b>	<b>RACV website</b>
<p><a href="http://vicroads.vic.gov.au">vicroads.vic.gov.au</a></p> <p>On the VicRoads website you can search on any of the following terms to find specific information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• medical conditions</li><li>• stroke</li><li>• dementia</li><li>• fitness to drive</li><li>• medical report.</li></ul>	<p><a href="http://racv.com.au">racv.com.au</a></p> <p>Search for 'dementia' to locate the RACV guide <i>Is driving with dementia possible?</i></p>
<b>Assessing Fitness to Drive</b>	<b>Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) website</b>
<p>Search for the <i>National Assessing Fitness to Drive</i> guidelines, which apply to all drivers across Australia.</p>	<p><a href="http://tac.vic.gov.au">tac.vic.gov.au</a></p> <p>Search for 'driving and pharmacy medications' for a list of some medications that can impair driving.</p>
<b>The Vision Initiative</b>	<b>NPS Medicine Wise</b>
<p><a href="http://visioninitiative.org.au">visioninitiative.org.au</a></p> <p>This site will provide you with general information regarding your eye health and having an eye check.</p>	<p><a href="http://nps.org.au">nps.org.au</a></p> <p>This site provides consumers and health professionals with information about the safe use of medicines. Search for the medicine type or health topic you want to know more about.</p>