

## Advice on driving with Parkinson's

Surrendering your driver license is like surrendering your independence – but unfortunately that time must come at some point in your Parkinson's journey.

So how do you know when the time comes? And what are your options?

It is important to remember that Parkinson's can affect your ability to self-evaluate. Therefore, it is a good starting point to discuss your driving with your caregivers and your doctor. They may have a different perception of your driving skills.

In the early stages of Parkinson's, you have the option to modify your driving habits to address the physical and cognitive changes you are experiencing. For example, you can adapt by driving shorter distances and avoiding peak hour traffic and night driving. Or if you drive a manual car, it may be sensible to convert to an automatic instead.

However, as your condition progresses, issues may develop which could result in impaired driving performance. These may include:

- U Reduced physical reaction time
- U Impaired problem solving
- U Fluctuation in physical symptoms
- U Tremor
- U Fatigue
- U Difficulty managing multiple tasks or inputs e.g. radio, passenger talking and observing and reacting to traffic conditions
- U Issues with concentration
- U Experiencing the On/Off phenomenon

### Insurance Regulations

It is recommended that you inform your insurance company of your Parkinson's diagnosis – however it is not mandatory. In some cases, failure to disclose this information may result in your insurance being cancelled.

### Driving, Parkinson's and Medications

Just as sight-impaired people must wear their glasses when driving, people living with Parkinson's must take their medication as prescribed when driving.

It is not always possible to predict, but some medications can affect driving ability. Reactions to medications vary between individuals and you may not realise that a medication is affecting your driving.

Therefore, when starting to take a new medication, check with your doctor and pharmacist that it is safe to drive.

Some warning signs associated with medications and their effect on your driving abilities include:

- U Drowsiness and fatigue
- U Dizziness, light-headedness, and fainting
- U Nausea
- U Unclear thoughts
- U Unsteadiness
- U Change in mood, e.g. increased aggressiveness

### **Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) Requirements**

NSW law requires the holder of a driver licence to notify, as soon as practicable, the RMS of any long-term injury or illness that may impair their ability to drive safely.

The RMS must be satisfied that all licence holders are medically fit to drive. A licence holder can be directed to have regular medical examinations because of a medical condition.

When you report your illness, it does not necessarily mean that your licence will be taken away. It does mean that the RMS can work with you and your doctor to manage your condition with respect to your driving.

For more information, seek the advice of the manager of your local Service NSW office as well as your doctor.

Your doctor does not make the rules but provides advice about how your health condition might affect your ability to drive safely and how it might be managed.

The RMS always makes the final decision about your licence status.

### **Will your doctor notify the RMS?**

As the relationship between you and your doctor is a confidential one, your doctor will not normally communicate directly with the RMS.

He or she will provide you with advice about your ability to drive safely, as well as a letter or report to take to the RMS.

Doctors also have an obligation to public safety so your doctor may notify the RMS directly if he or she feels your condition poses a significant threat to public safety.

## **What happens if you don't follow your doctor's advice?**

If you continue to drive despite your doctor's advice and you do not report your condition to the RMS, you are not fulfilling your legal responsibility.

If you are involved in an accident under these circumstances and it is found that your health condition was a contributing factor, you may be prosecuted.

## **Medical Examinations**

If you are required to have a medical examination, the RMS will send you a letter with a medical report form about eight weeks prior to the date it is due.

## **Specialised Driver Assessment and Retraining Service**

Drivers living with Parkinson's may require a driving assessment by a suitably qualified occupational therapist before a licence will be issued or reissued.

CRS Australia (previously called the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service) employs Rehabilitation Consultants who provide assessment and training in many locations throughout NSW as part of its rehabilitation programs.

Alternatively, you may choose to arrange your own driving assessment by a suitably qualified Occupational Therapist.

The NSW Government State Insurance Regulatory Authority provides an online [search facility](#) to allow you to identify an Authorised Rehabilitation Provider near you.

The Australian Association of Occupational Therapists offers a similar search facility to find its authorised members [here](#).

## **Concerned about the driving of a relative or friend?**

If you know a licence holder whose health might be affecting his/her ability to drive safely, it is important to get them to talk to their doctor.

If they are unwilling to discuss this with a doctor, you should contact the RMS who will deal with the matter confidentially.

For many people giving up their right to drive can be a serious and upsetting step. Make sure that their driving skills really are unsafe. Do not mistake cautious and courteous driving for reduced ability to drive.

## **For more information contact:**

Parkinson's NSW InfoLine 1800 644 189