

Driving and Eating Disorders Information for service users

Eating disorders and its complications may affect your ability to drive. This leaflet is designed to help you understand how your eating difficulty may affect your ability to drive.

You are advised to consider whether you are fit to drive for your own and other road users' safety. Seek advice from your clinical team if you are unsure whether you should drive.

What affects your ability to drive?

Low weight or low BMI (Body Mass Index)

There is no recommended minimum BMI that makes you unfit to drive but it is generally accepted that if you cannot rise from the horizontal position on a bed, feel dizzy, are unable to make rapid decisions whilst driving or have low blood sugar and/or low blood pressure then you are advised not to drive.



Low blood sugar or hypoglycaemia

This is a condition that occurs when your blood sugar (glucose) is too low. One of the causes of low blood sugar, in non-diabetic people, is fasting and/or malnutrition. If your blood sugar gets too low you may faint (a sudden, temporary loss of consciousness), feel dizzy and become less alert. As a result of low blood sugar, your reaction time will decrease.

Low blood sugar can be raised with appropriate nutrition such as sugary food eg chocolate, glucose tablets.

Low body temperature or hypothermia

This can cause confusion, weakness, loss of coordination and drowsiness. In anorexia nervosa, shrinkage of vital organs such as the heart or brain can affect the blood circulation. As a result, blood flow to various parts of the body (especially the hands and feet) will be affected.

Without proper circulation, the core body temperature could drop. People with anorexia nervosa normally have a very low percentage of body fat and therefore feel cold. Fat insulates your body and helps to retain heat. Without it, you may feel cold and experience

muscle tension, shivering and shaking. Poor blood flow to your brain affects your ability to make rapid decisions whilst driving.

Imbalance of minerals

An imbalance of minerals such as potassium, calcium, magnesium and phosphate, is a danger to the heart.

These minerals are normally dissolved in the body's fluid. Dehydration (poor fluid intake) and starvation can reduce fluid and mineral levels in the body – a condition known as electrolyte imbalance.

Electrolytes, especially calcium and potassium, are essential for the electric currents necessary for a normal heartbeat. A low level of potassium or hypokalemia may cause tiredness, weakness and muscle twitching and jerking which make driving dangerous.

Low blood pressure or hypotension

This can sometimes mean that there is not enough blood flowing to your brain and other vital organs. As a result, you may experience dizziness, fainting, blurred vision, confusion and weakness which make driving dangerous.

For your information

Ensure you eat a substantial meal/snack that includes carbohydrates (eg bread, pasta) an hour before you are going to drive.

Avoid long distance journeys (driving). For long distance journeys, regular breaks are recommended, for example every hour. Take snacks to eat during these breaks.

You are not required to inform DVLA if you have an eating disorder. However, DVLA guidance states that any serious mental health difficulty should be reported to the DVLA (we recognise eating disorders as a serious mental health difficulty).

If you insist on driving while unfit for the reasons mentioned above, then you may be reported to DVLA. The DVLA may require a formal medical assessment, impose a driving ban and may require re-examination by a DVLA doctor.

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