

Driving, painkillers and other medicines



If your ability to drive safely is impaired by any cause, including medication or alcohol, you are breaking the law if you drive.

You should not drive if, for whatever reason, you feel drowsy, dizzy, unable to concentrate or make decisions, or if you have blurred or double vision.

The law on driving

From March 2015 you are breaking the law if you drive with certain drugs above specified levels in the body, whether your driving is impaired or not. However, if you have been prescribed these medicines, and are taking them as directed, and your driving is not impaired, you are not breaking the law.

The list of drugs includes certain medicines that are sometimes abused, such as medicines used to treat:

- Extreme pain (morphine, diamorphine, ketamine).
- Anxiety or inability to sleep (diazepam, clonazepam, lorazepam, oxazepam, temazepam).
- Drug addiction (methadone).
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, also known as ADHD (amphetamine).
- Multiple sclerosis (nabiximols).

What will happen if I'm stopped by the police?

The police may use a roadside test to see if you have taken any of the drugs. If the test detects any relevant drugs, the type and level of the drugs in your body can be confirmed by a blood test taken at the police station. The law provides you with a "medical defence". This states that you are not guilty if:

- the medicine was prescribed, supplied, or sold to you to treat a medical or dental problem, *and*
- you took the medicine according to the instructions given by the prescriber or the information provided with the medicine.

How painkillers affect people

Many patients being cared for by a palliative care team will be taking strong painkillers.

Strong painkillers affect each person in a different way. Strong painkillers make some people drowsy, and reactions can be slower than usual. This may be worse if you take other medicines or tablets that cause drowsiness, or if you drink alcohol.

Other medicines can also affect your ability to drive, and you should always check the leaflet that comes with your medicines for information on how they may affect your driving ability.

Strong painkillers commonly prescribed by doctors include morphine, oxycodone, fentanyl, buprenorphine, tapentadol. There are several different brands available for most of these drugs.

Advice on driving whilst taking strong painkillers

Most people who are on a stable dose of strong painkillers find that their driving is not impaired. However, this may not be the case around dose changes and after starting a new painkiller or additional medicines.

- You should not drive for five days after starting or changing the dose of your strong painkiller. Sometimes longer is needed.
- You must not drive if you feel sleepy, dizzy or unable to concentrate.
- You must not drive after drinking alcohol or taking strong drugs which have not been prescribed or recommended by your doctor e.g. cannabis.
- You must not drive if you start taking other drugs that cause sleepiness, either prescribed by your doctor or bought from the chemist e.g. hay fever medicine.
- You must not drive on days where you have had to take extra (breakthrough or rescue) doses of strong painkiller e.g. Oramorph.

Restarting driving

If after five days you are not sleepy, or impaired in any other way, you may start driving. Make your first trip:

- Short.
- On roads that you are familiar with.
- At a time when the traffic is not too busy.

You may find it helpful to have an experienced, insured driver accompanying you to begin with, in case you find that you are unable to complete your journey.

Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

You do not need to inform the DVLA that you are starting a strong painkiller. However, there may be other information about your illness that the DVLA needs to know. Your doctors or the DVLA can advise you about this.

For drivers medical enquiries call: **0300 790 6806**

(You will need to have your driving licence number available).

Website site: www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla/y/driving-and-medical-issues

Address: **Drivers Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU**

Car insurance

You may need to inform your motor insurance company about your current state of health and what medication you are taking. Each insurance company is different. It is best to discuss your circumstances with your insurance company to be sure that you are covered.

Mobility Centres

These centres offer help, information and practical assessment for a patient that would like to return to driving after an illness, injury or accident. They offer a driving assessment and will also assess the car if modifications are needed.

Cornwall Mobility Centre
North Buildings
Royal Cornwall Hospital
Truro TR1 3LQ

Tel: 01872 254920

Driving and Mobility Centre
The Vassall Centre
Gill Avenue
Fishponds
Bristol BS16 2QQ

Tel: 0117 965 9353

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