

RSA

NDLS

National Driver Licence Service

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta um Cheadúnais Tiomána

Epilepsy, Seizures and Driving

This is an overview of driving with epilepsy. The complete standards are published in *Sláinte agus Tiomáint: Medical Fitness to Drive (MFTD) Guidelines*.



This leaflet covers medical fitness to drive relating to epilepsy, first seizures and provoked seizures. These terms are defined below.

What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a medical condition characterised by frequent seizures, sometimes referred to as ‘epileptic fits’. Seizures cause abnormal electrical activity in the brain which can affect movement and behaviour. There are different types of epilepsy and seizures. In most cases, seizures are controlled by medication.

What are ‘provoked’ and ‘unprovoked’ seizures?

A provoked seizure is one where the cause can usually be identified – for example, a head trauma or low blood sugar. An unprovoked seizure has no cause that can be identified.

Why is health important for drivers?

Your health is important, as driving any motor vehicle requires:

- constant attention;
- good judgement;
- appropriate responsiveness;
- reasonable perception and physical capability; and
- good senses – for example, sight and hearing.

All of these can be affected by a driver’s physical and psychological health. In someone with epilepsy, these abilities can also be altered before, during and after a seizure.

Why is it important I am fully fit to drive?

- The Road Safety Authority (RSA) and the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) aim to minimise the risk caused by any medical condition you might have both to you and to the community. Indeed, for many conditions, treatment and rehabilitation may improve your safety when driving.
- We also want to give consideration to your social, lifestyle and employment-related mobility and independence. Our aim is to help you be as independently mobile as possible for as long as possible. However, it is important to strike the right balance between mobility and safety for drivers, their families and other road users.
- If you drive against advice, and evidence is found of this, the NDLS and the Gardaí will take action to revoke your licence. If you are involved in a crash or stopped by a member of An Garda Síochána, you may be asked to prove you are in full control of your vehicle. A charge can be brought against you even if you don't have a crash. If you cause harm to a person or property, the charge will be more serious. In these circumstances, driving becomes a statutory offence that may lead to a prison sentence. Finally, driving against medical advice will affect your car insurance.

Epilepsy

How does being diagnosed with epilepsy affect my driver's licence?

A diagnosis of epilepsy is usually made if you have had two or more seizures less than five years apart.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving until you have been seizure free for 12 months.

After that, if you do not have any other medical condition(s) relevant to driving:

- a 1 year licence may be issued; and
- a 10-year licence may be issued if you have not had a seizure for 5 years.

If you have seizures only when you are asleep, you can find advice later in this leaflet on page 7.

Group 2 drivers – driving a bus or truck

You must stop driving until you have been seizure free for 10 years without using anti-epileptic medication.

If you are a Group 1 or Group 2 driver and you have been diagnosed with epilepsy, you must stop driving until your treating consultant is satisfied that your medical results show that you are medically fit to drive, and until the minimum seizure-free period as outlined above has passed.

I'm a Group 2 driver (driving a bus or truck) – why are the health standards higher for me?

The standards set for you are higher because your job carries extra responsibilities, including:

- the time you spend driving,
- the weight and size of the vehicle you drive,
- your responsibility for passengers, and
- the type of cargo you transport.

First unprovoked seizure

How does a first unprovoked seizure affect my driving licence?

A first unprovoked seizure is not necessarily epilepsy, unless you suffer a further seizure within 5 years.

If you are a Group 1 or Group 2 driver and have a first unprovoked seizure, you must stop driving until your treating consultant is satisfied that your medical results show that you are medically fit to drive. You can't just start driving after the minimum seizure-free period as outlined below has passed.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving until you have been seizure free for 6 months.

After that, if you do not have any other medical condition(s) relevant to driving:

- a 1 year licence may be issued; and
- a 10-year licence may be issued if you have not had a seizure for 5 years.

Group 2 drivers – driving a bus or truck

You must stop driving until you have been seizure free for 5 years without using anti-epileptic medication.

Exceptional cases for Group 1 drivers only

A Group 1 driver can be declared as an exceptional case if:

1. they have a provoked seizure;
2. the seizures only happen when they are asleep;
3. the seizure pattern does not affect consciousness or the ability to act at any time;
4. the seizures are as a result of withdrawal from anti-epileptic medication.

The table below provides more detail on each of these exceptions.

1. Provoked seizure - exception

A seizure which has recognisable cause and is, therefore, avoidable, and where you have no previous history of epileptic seizure.

Examples are seizures that happen:

- during pregnancy;
- collapse or twitching due to lack of oxygen;
- in first week following a head injury;
- at the time of a stroke or within 24 hours of a stroke;
- during brain surgery or within 24 hours of brain surgery.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving until your doctor has assessed you and is satisfied that your medical results show that you are medically fit to drive.

If your doctor is satisfied that your seizure meets the description given above for provoked seizures, they can make an individual assessment as to when you are medically fit to drive.

What are **not** considered provoked seizures?

Seizures that occur as a result of:

- alcohol or drug misuse;
- sleep deprivation;
- structural abnormality in the brain.

2. Seizures happen only when asleep - exception

Your treating consultant must be satisfied that you have an established pattern of sleep seizures with no history of seizures while you are awake.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving until this pattern of exclusive sleep seizures has been established for the minimum period of 12 months.

After that, if you do not have any other medical condition(s) relevant to driving:

- a 1 year licence may be issued.

3. Seizures that do not affect consciousness or ability to act at any time - exception

Your treating consultant will review your seizure history and other clinical factors to determine that your seizures do not affect your consciousness and your ability to act and function normally at any time.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving until a seizure pattern has been established for 12 months.

After this pattern has been established for 12 months, your treating consultant must be satisfied that:

- your seizures do not impair consciousness or driving ability at any time;
- you have not had any other seizure types for at least one year; and
- you follow medical advice, including taking any prescribed medication as directed.

After that, if you do not have any other medical condition(s) relevant to driving:

- a 1-year licence may be issued subject to at least a yearly review.

4. Seizures resulting from withdrawal of anti-epileptic medication – exception

You should be aware that you are at risk of a seizure once you reduce or stop your epilepsy medication, even when you do so under medical supervision.

Group 1 drivers – driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

You must stop driving from the date you begin reducing your anti-epileptic medication. Once you have stopped taking all anti-epileptic medication, you must not drive for a minimum period of 6 months. After that, you must get medical fitness to drive certification from your treating consultant.

General advice

If you experience seizures, blackouts or episodes of memory loss, you should see a doctor so that the risk of further episodes and the need for treatment can be determined.

Get a correct diagnosis of epilepsy or your seizure type. It means the right treatment is started, and your ability to drive safely can be assessed.

Some seizure types are not epilepsy, but they are related to other medical conditions. You should get advice from your doctor on your seizure type and your driving.

What will happen if I continue to drive?

It is important to strike a balance between mobility and safety. If you continue to drive against medical advice, and evidence is found of this, it will affect your insurance. Also, the NDLS and the Gardaí will take action to revoke (cancel) your licence.

Be a responsible driver

It is your responsibility as a driver to:

- follow your doctor's advice
- take your prescribed medication correctly and consistently
- monitor and manage your medical condition(s)
- tell the NDLS and your insurance provider if you have a long-term or permanent injury or illness that may affect your ability to drive safely
- meet the requirements of your licence, including going for regular medical check-ups to make sure that your symptoms are managed well for safe driving
- get professional medical advice on your medical fitness to drive, which might include training with an On- Road Driving Assessor (ORDA) or Occupational Therapist (OT)
- get further professional medical advice if you develop a new medical condition or if your medical condition changes.

If I need to, how do I inform the NDLS?

If following a consultation with your doctor, your medical condition is one that must be notified to the NDLS you will need to have a medical report form completed and make an application for a change of personal (medical) details. This can be done by

- applying in person at an NDLS centre, which is by appointment only. Please see www.ndls.ie/how-to-apply/applying-in-person
- applying online*, provided you have a Public Services Card and a verified MyGovID account.

*If you have a code 101 on your existing licence and you are not renewing and you wish to update your medical details you will need to attend an NDLS centre to have this done.

The NDLS does not accept notifications of medical conditions by email or post.

For further information, please see **www.ndls.ie/medical-fitness**

If you have more questions, please email **medicalfitness@rsa.ie** or telephone **096 25000**.

Further information:

- Your doctor or nurse
- Epilepsy Ireland is a valuable source of support:

Web: www.epilepsy.ie/

Helpline: (0)1 455 7500

Email: info@epilepsy.ie

Sláinte agus Tiomáint: Medical Fitness to Drive Guidelines is available on www.ndls.ie



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