

Diabetes

and driving

If you have diabetes, you need to be aware of the risks when you're driving and take steps to manage them.

Hyperglycaemia (high blood glucose)

Very high blood glucose levels can leave you feeling unwell or tired, and may affect your ability to drive safely. You shouldn't drive if you feel unwell with high glucose levels.

Hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose)

Low blood glucose levels can affect your ability to drive safely. Some common symptoms are sweating, shaking, tremors and palpitations.

Treatment with insulin, gliclazide or glipizide increases the risk of low glucose levels. If you're on these treatments, it's important you follow the precautions below to avoid low blood glucose levels.

Newly diagnosed

If your diabetes has just been diagnosed and your treatment is still being adjusted, you may not be fit to drive just yet.

Check with your health practitioner, for example your doctor (GP), nurse practitioner, or specialist.

Precautions while driving

If your diabetes is well controlled, you can drive safely. However, you need to be prepared if you are on gliclazide, glipizide or insulin treatment:

- Always have meals and snacks before and during long journeys. It's safest not to delay meal times. Take regular, short breaks from driving to check glucose levels – don't finger prick when driving!
- Know your low blood glucose level symptoms – pull over and stop driving if your symptoms occur. Make sure you have your blood glucose meter or continuous glucose monitoring system and rapid acting carbohydrates for treatment of low glucose levels, such as glucose tablets or fruit juice, in your vehicle.
 - Check your glucose levels and if they're less than 4.2 mmol/L have rapid acting carbohydrates such as glucose tablets, fruit juice, or sugary drink (not sugar free).
 - If you're not on insulin pump therapy, also have a snack of slower acting carbs like muesli bars or biscuits to make sure your glucose levels don't get low again.

- Keep a close eye on your glucose levels and repeat treatment if necessary. Don't drive with low glucose levels.

- Discuss a driving plan with your health team if you don't get symptoms of low glucose levels – known as hypoglycaemic unawareness. You can get continuous glucose monitoring with alarms which can be helpful to warn you of low glucose levels.
- Changing a car tyre or pushing a car could result in low blood glucose levels. Be prepared!
- If you have diabetes, alcohol can cause hypoglycaemia or worsen its effects. Avoid having even small amounts of alcohol if you're going to drive.

When not to drive

If you have a mild hypoglycaemic episode, don't drive for at least an hour and give your brain time to recover.

If you have a severe hypoglycaemic episode (you need someone else's help), don't drive for 24 hours. If you're on gliclazide or glipizide then you can't drive for 48 hours after a severe episode of low glucose levels.

If you have several hypoglycaemic episodes, talk to your health practitioner before you drive again.

If you have a severe hypoglycaemic episode while you're driving, don't drive for at least 4 weeks – whether you're involved in a crash or not. You'll need to talk to your health practitioner – it's likely you'll need to see a specialist before you can safely drive again.

Long-term complications

Your ability to drive safely could be affected by long-term complications of diabetes, such as eyesight deterioration and the loss of normal sensation in your feet. Check with your health practitioner.

Licence conditions

Your licence may be issued with conditions attached. The conditions will depend on:

- the classes and endorsements on your licence
- how your diabetes is controlled
- if there's any history of hypoglycaemic attacks
- how carefully you follow your medication schedule
- an assessment of how much you're affected by the medical complications commonly associated with diabetes.

The NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) decides the licence conditions, using the *Medical aspects of fitness to drive* guide, and consulting with NZTA's Chief Medical Advisor.

Examples of conditions that NZTA may put on your licence are:

- Carry and regularly use glucometer while driving.
- Not to drive when blood sugar 4.2 or below.
- Subject to Annual Medical Report.

Where can I find out more?

Diabetes New Zealand:

- (04) 499 7145 or 0800 342 238
- www.diabetes.org.nz

See your health practitioner or other specialist.

Contact NZ Transport Agency.



This factsheet is a general guide only. It doesn't replace legal advice, and your exact requirements will depend on current legislation.

Make sure you have the most up-to-date version of this factsheet by checking www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets



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