

Disabilities

and driving

Most people with physical disabilities can get a driver licence, and most people who had a licence before they acquired a disability can continue to drive.

Advances in vehicle technology, such as power steering and automatic cars, have helped make driving possible for people with physical disabilities. In addition, almost any standard production vehicle can be modified.

What modifications can be made?

Modifications that can be made to private vehicles include:

- steering and secondary control aids
- left-foot accelerators
- clutch conversions
- additional car mirrors
- wheelchair stowage equipment.

Some vehicle modifications require inspection and certification to ensure they are safe. These include:

- hand controls for braking and accelerating
- handbrake devices
- seatbelt modifications, harnesses and special seating
- joystick and foot steering (a four-way joystick can be used to steer, accelerate and brake)
- infrared remote control systems, which mean you can get in the vehicle and drive from a wheelchair with complete independence.

Who carries out modifications?

If a vehicle has to be modified, the alterations must be carried out by a person with the appropriate skills and experience. A health professional experienced in driver training and an approved low volume vehicle certifier will ensure that the vehicle is safe and the alterations meet the needs of the user.

The following organisations can give you more information about certifiers who can inspect your vehicle and can advise you about vehicle modification for drivers with physical disabilities:

- the **Low Volume Vehicle Technical Association (LVVTA)**
www.lvvtta.org.nz
- the **Ministry of Health**
www.health.govt.nz.

If your disability makes it difficult for you to access this information, get a friend to help you.

Getting on the road

If you have a physical disability, you should get professional assistance from a driving assessment service. The service can:

- test your driving ability on the road
- give advice on the controls and adaptations you need for access, seating, and to drive safely and in comfort
- evaluate your muscle strength and range of movement.

For information on where to find your nearest assessment

centre, contact Accessable (ph: 0508 001 002, website: www.accessable.co.nz) or Enable New Zealand (ph: 0800 362 253, website: www.enable.co.nz).

I have a medical condition

If you have a medical condition such as diabetes, epilepsy, dementia or poor vision, or you've had a head injury, heart attack or stroke, check with your medical advisor.

Factsheets on most of these conditions are available from:

- our website www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets
- agents of the NZ Transport Agency (selected branches of the AA and VTNZ)
- the Transport Agency's offices.

I have a temporary disability

Disabilities such as broken arms or legs, migraines and so on may not stop you from driving, but you need to decide how safe you and other road users will be.

Plaster casts may be uncomfortable and can make it difficult to control a vehicle. You must get guidance from your health practitioner concerning how the cast will affect your ability to operate all the vehicle's controls. Your health practitioner could be your usual doctor (GP), a registered nurse or nurse practitioner, or a specialist if appropriate.

I have a progressive disability

Multiple sclerosis, arthritis, Parkinson's disease, loss of hearing or vision, and aging may subject your body to changes that affect your ability to drive safely.

It's important that you are aware of the effect these conditions may have on your ability to control a vehicle safely. Don't assume that your driving won't be affected.

If you have a progressive disability, you may need to adjust your driving as changes occur.

If you take medication, or if your medication changes, you must make sure your driving isn't affected. Get professional medical advice.

I've had an amputation

If you've had an amputation, you'll need to consult your health practitioner. They may:

- issue a certificate stating that you should only drive an automatic vehicle and/or that the vehicle should be fitted with special mechanical devices
- refer you to a driving assessment service.

There's usually no difficulty adapting an artificial limb to a vehicle, or a vehicle to a limb.

For more information, contact a driving assessment service.

I suffer from deafness

If you're deaf, there's no reason why you can't drive a private motorcar.

You may need to consider, however, the need for additional rear vision mirrors. Having side mirrors on both sides of your vehicle can help you detect vehicles that use sound and lights to warn drivers of their presence (eg emergency vehicles).

I have poor vision

Every driver must pass a standard eyesight test before they can get a driver licence. If you've got monocular vision (vision through one eye), you may be able to drive. You need to have a visual field of 140 degrees and 6/12 vision in your good eye. It's likely that you'll have a condition on your licence requiring external rear view mirrors on both sides of your vehicle.

Getting a driver licence

If you have a disability and you want to get your driver licence, you'll still sit the standard theory and practical driving tests. If you can only drive in a specially equipped vehicle, the test will be carried out in that vehicle.

Consideration of individual cases is possible and you may be permitted to drive subject to special conditions. Unfortunately, some people – for their own safety and that of others – aren't permitted to drive.

Applicants for licence classes 2 to 5 and P, V, I and O endorsements require special medical, eyesight and hearing examinations.

Parking concessions

If you have a disability, you may qualify for parking concessions. Contact your local CCS Disability Action branch (formerly New Zealand Crippled Children Society) for more information.

Mobility scooters and power chairs

An increasing number of people with disabilities are turning to mobility scooters and power chairs (electric wheelchairs) as a form of transportation. This is usually because they are unable to drive a motor vehicle.

Most mobility scooters and power chairs are battery powered and have three or four wheels.

What laws apply to mobility scooters and power chairs?

Mobility scooters and power chairs are legally defined as 'wheeled mobility devices'.

You don't need a driver licence to operate a wheeled mobility device, and they are not required to have a warrant of fitness or registration. There are, however, some important legal safety requirements you need to know about:

- You must operate your mobility scooter or power chair in a careful and considerate manner.
- You must use the footpath, when it is readily accessible, and stay close to the side of the road when a footpath is not readily accessible.
- When on the footpath, you must not travel at a speed that

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endangers others.

- It's illegal for you to ride, or let any person ride, your mobility scooter or power chair in a way that may cause you or them injury.
- If you are involved in a crash, you must stop to see if anyone is injured, help anyone who is injured, and report the crash to the Police within 24 hours.

It's important to be aware that careless use of a mobility scooter or power chair carries legal implications.

For example, operating a wheeled mobility device carelessly, inconsiderately or at a hazardous speed can result in a fine of up to \$1000.

If you cause a crash where someone is injured or killed, you could be convicted of careless or inconsiderate use of a vehicle, and face a fine of up to \$4500, or up to three months imprisonment.

Safety hints

Your mobility scooter or power chair should be serviced by a qualified service technician regularly. Some manufacturers recommend that mobility scooters and power chairs are given a safety check similar to a warrant of fitness every six months. This includes getting the brakes, electronics and controls serviced, and the tyre pressure and battery checked.

Remember to always do the following:

- Ride your mobility scooter or power chair sensibly.
- Adjust your speed to the conditions.
- Use a lower speed when turning abruptly.
- Plan your travel so you miss peak time pedestrian traffic and places where there could be a lot of people.
- Keep to the side of the footpath as much as possible, to give pedestrians room to pass you.
- Keep your speed down when riding on the footpath.
- Use your indicators, if your vehicle has them. If it doesn't, use hand signals.
- Try not to startle pedestrians if you use a warning device (eg a horn).
- Use pedestrian crossings. If you can't find one, avoid travelling over kerbs and don't cross the road without first checking carefully that the way is clear.
- Slow down if you're driving in a hazardous area, so you can avoid potential dangers.

There are a number of safety accessories available, such as indicators, lights, horns, reversing beepers, warning flags and rear view mirrors.

For more information about legal requirements for mobility scooters and power chairs, see Land Transport (Road User) Rule 2004. You can access this at: www.nzta.govt.nz.

Where can I find out more?

Read our booklet *Ready to ride: Keeping safe on your mobility scooter*. Download a copy from our website at www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/keeping-mobile or you can call us on 0800 822 422.

Contact details

- Call our contact centre: 0800 822 422.
- Visit our website: www.nzta.govt.nz.
- Email us: info@nzta.govt.nz.
- Write to us: NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 11777, Palmerston North 4442.