

# Diabetes and Driving

1 of 3

## How does diabetes affect my driving?

Driving a motor vehicle comes with major personal and legal responsibilities. Driving is a complex skill both physically and mentally and for people with diabetes who drive, extra precautions need to be taken to help increase road safety. The main danger for those who take insulin or glucose lowering medications is the unexpected occurrence of hypoglycaemia (hypo) but fortunately, most hypos can be prevented.

## What are the symptoms of a hypo?

A hypo, or **low blood glucose** (below 4mmol/L) may develop quickly due to:

- » Delaying or missing a meal

- » Unplanned physical activity
- » Not eating enough carbohydrate
- » Drinking too much alcohol
- » Taking too much insulin

Early warning signs or symptoms may include:

- » Trembling or shaking
- » Lack of concentration/behaviour change
- » Sweating
- » Irritability
- » Light headedness
- » Double vision
- » Hunger
- » Loss of consciousness
- » Headache
- » Dizziness

- » Palpitations or shudders
- » Numbness or tingling around the lips

If a hypo is not treated quickly, the blood glucose level can continue to drop and may lead to:

- » Loss of coordination
- » Confusion
- » Slurred speech
- » Loss of consciousness

## How can I make sure that I drive safely?

Be prepared.

- » Test your blood glucose and make sure it is above 5mmol/L before driving, and keep a record of blood glucose levels.
- » Carry identification both on yourself and in your car indicating that you have diabetes.
- » Test your blood glucose every 2 hours while you are driving and make sure it is above 5mmol/L.
- » At all times, carry a fast acting carbohydrate food or sugary drink in your car.
- » **Do not** drive for more than 2 hours without considering a snack, and do not delay or miss a main meal.
- » Be a safe driver and consider the safety of your passengers, other road users and yourself.

Driving a motor vehicle comes with major personal and legal responsibilities.

## What should I do if I think I'm having a hypo while driving?

Stay calm.

- » **Stop** driving as soon as it is safe to do so.
- » Remove the key from the ignition.
- » Test your blood glucose.
- » If your blood glucose level is below 4mmol/L, **immediately** take at least 15 grams of a fast acting carbohydrate or sugary drink.
- » Wait 15 minutes and then test your blood glucose again. Repeat treatment with fast acting carbohydrate if required.
- » Follow this up by taking a longer acting carbohydrate (fruit, bread, milk or muesli bar).
- » **Do not** start driving again until at least 30 minutes after your hypo symptoms have completely gone and you feel well, and your blood glucose level is **above 5mmol/L**. Studies have shown that your brain function may take this long to fully recover.

## What is a fast acting carbohydrate?

Fast acting carbohydrate foods or drinks that you should take to treat a hypo are:

- » 6-10 jelly beans (approximately 15-20 grams)
- » Glucose tablets (15-20 grams)
- » Fruit juice (150-200mls or approximately half a cup)
- » Lucozade (100-200mls or approximately half a cup)
- » Soft drink (150-200mls or approximately half a can) – **not** diet or low calorie drinks

## What if I have experienced a severe hypo in the past?

If you have experienced a severe hypoglycaemic episode involving loss of consciousness in any situation, you are at risk of further episodes and this can be life-threatening to you, your passengers and other road users.

**Do not** resume driving until you have medical clearance to do so (as per the Assessing Fitness To Drive (AFTD) - [austroads.com.au](http://austroads.com.au)). Your diabetes specialist will need to determine your fitness to safely resume driving.

## Other conditions that may affect your driving

If you have diabetes you may be at risk of developing other health related complications. Therefore you should check with your doctor about the following:

- » **High blood glucose:** high blood glucose (or hyperglycaemia) may cause tiredness, blurred vision and altered decision making. You should not drive if you feel unwell and see your doctor for treatment.

- » **Eyes:** have your eyes checked every 12 months or as recommended by your doctor.
- » **Feet:** if your feet or legs are numb or painful, or you have trouble feeling the pedals when you drive, promptly seek advice from your doctor or podiatrist.
- » **Heart:** heart disease and high blood pressure are more common in people with diabetes. See your doctor for regular monitoring.
- » **Sleep:** sleep apnoea and snoring problems are more common in people with type 2 diabetes, particularly if overweight. Sleep apnoea can cause excessive daytime drowsiness and loss of concentration while driving. Talk to your doctor.
- » **Surgery:** after any surgery or medical procedure, talk to your doctor to find out when you are fit to start driving again.

## Driving Checklist

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I check my blood glucose level before driving and make sure the reading is above 5mmol/L        | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have daytime drowsiness or untreated sleep apnoea       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I carry fast acting carbohydrate when I drive   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had my eyes checked in the last 12 months                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I carry my glucose meter when I drive   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had my feet checked in the last 12 months                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I check my blood glucose every 2 hours while I drive and make sure the reading is above 5mmol/L | <input type="checkbox"/> I carry an ID that says I have diabetes                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I see my doctor and other health care team members on a regular basis                           | <input type="checkbox"/> I have advised my driving licence authority that I have diabetes |

**Remember – Above Five to Drive**

## Other things you need to know

It is your **legal responsibility** to advise the driving licence authority in your state or territory if you take glucose lowering medications including insulin. If your diabetes is managed with diet and exercise only, notification requirements vary and you should look at the driving licence authority requirements in your state or territory (see below for details).

It is important to be aware of the following:

- » There may be conditions placed on your driver's licence because of your diabetes.
- » If you are a commercial driver then an endocrinologist or other specialist in diabetes may need to make recommendations on your fitness to drive.
- » You will need to plan ahead for your doctor's medical report about your fitness to drive. Check well ahead of time which records, such as self blood glucose results or other materials, you should bring to the appointment.

## Useful resources

Driving licence authority in your state or territory:

State	Contact	Website	Phone
ACT	Road User Services	<a href="http://www.rego.act.gov.au">www.rego.act.gov.au</a>	13 22 81
NSW	Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW	<a href="http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au">www.rta.nsw.gov.au</a>	13 22 13
NT	Northern Territory Transport Group	<a href="http://www.nt.gov.au">www.nt.gov.au</a>	1300 654 628
QLD	Department of Transport and Main Roads	<a href="http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au">www.tmr.qld.gov.au</a>	132 380
SA	Department of Transport of SA	<a href="http://www.transport.sa.gov.au">www.transport.sa.gov.au</a>	13 10 84
TAS	Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources TAS	<a href="http://www.dier.tas.gov.au">www.dier.tas.gov.au</a>	1300 851 225
VIC	Vic Roads	<a href="http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au">www.vicroads.vic.gov.au</a>	13 11 71
WA	Department of Transport WA	<a href="http://www.transport.wa.gov.au">www.transport.wa.gov.au</a>	13 11 56

## Other resources:

### Your doctor and diabetes health care team

Assessing Fitness to Drive	<a href="http://www.austroads.com.au">www.austroads.com.au</a>
Diabetes Australia and your state or territory diabetes organisation	<a href="http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au">www.diabetesaustralia.com.au</a>
Australian Diabetes Society	<a href="http://www.diabetessociety.com.au">www.diabetessociety.com.au</a>
Australian Diabetes Educators Association	<a href="http://www.adea.com.au">www.adea.com.au</a>