

Patient Information Leaflet

Strong painkillers and driving

This leaflet is for people who are taking a strong painkiller and want to drive.

You have been given this leaflet because you are taking _____ for your pain.

Strong painkillers can cause drowsiness and affect your ability to drive safely. The drowsiness may go away once you have been on the same dose for about a week. Other medicines you may be taking at the same time can make drowsiness worse (such as anti-sickness medicines and other medicines used for pain, for example, gabapentin, anti-depressants, ketamine).

Your doctor or pharmacist will tell you if you have been prescribed a medicine or have a condition that will affect your driving. If you think that your medicines or condition are affecting your driving, then you should stop driving and discuss the problem with your doctor.

A new law on driving after taking certain drugs (including some medicines) came into force in Scotland in October 2019.

This law states that it is an offence to drive with certain drugs above set levels in your body, whether your driving is affected or not. However, if you are above the set limit, you will not commit the new offence **as long as** your driving is not affected **and** you are taking your medicine in line with the advice of a healthcare professional. The new law sets limits at very low levels for eight drugs commonly associated with illegal drug use, such as cannabis and cocaine, to tackle illegal drug use and driving. The law also includes eight drugs commonly associated with medicinal use, but that are sometimes abused. These have been set at higher limits based on the available evidence of the road safety risk and to reflect their use as medicines. These are:

- Morphine or opioid-based medicines, for example codeine that will chemically change into morphine and show a blood result
- diazepam, clonazepam, flunitrazepam, lorazepam, oxazepam, or temazepam
- methadone
- amphetamine; for example dexamfetamine used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or selegiline used to treat Parkinson's disease, is also included within the offence. Amphetamines are illegal but also have a medicinal use with limits set using an approach that balances risk.

The majority of patients that are fit to drive and are taking medicines as directed are unlikely to be above the specified limit. Therefore they would not be committing the new offence. For further information, please refer to the information leaflet provided via the link <https://www.gov.scot/publications/drug-driving-rules-promotional-material>

If you have any questions or worries about driving when taking strong painkillers, you should speak to your doctor or pharmacist. Your doctor may be able to change some of your medicines to reduce side effects that are affecting your ability to drive safely. More detailed advice is available from the Medical Advisory branch of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

If you or your doctor are concerned that your ability to drive is being affected by your condition or treatment, then you must inform the DVLA and your insurance company.

- ✓ DO ask your doctor whether you can drive when the dose of a strong painkiller has changed or a new medicine has been prescribed.
- ✓ DO think about driving again once you are settled on the same dose of strong painkiller and you do not feel drowsy or unwell.
- ✗ DO NOT drive soon after taking a breakthrough dose of a quick-acting (immediate release) strong painkiller (e.g. morphine liquid or tablets, Oramorph[®] liquid, OxyNorm[®] or Shortec[®] liquid or capsules) as you may be drowsy at that time.
- ✗ DO NOT drive if you develop any signs or symptoms suggesting your driving may be affected such as sleepiness, poor co-ordination, difficulties with your thinking, dizziness, or eyesight difficulties.
- ✗ DO NOT drive after your dose of long-acting (modified release) strong painkiller (e.g. MST Continus[®], Morphgesic[®], MXL[®], Zomorph[®], fentanyl patch, OxyContin[®], Longtec[®], Oxypro[®]) has been increased until you are used to the new dose.
- ✗ DO NOT drive if you have severe pain, pain which distresses you, or you feel drowsy or are unable to concentrate properly.
- ✗ DO NOT drink any alcohol and drive.
- ✗ DO NOT take more than the prescribed dose of painkiller.

Any other important information?

Further information can be obtained from the DVLA which has a section on driving if you have a medical condition.

<https://www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla/y/driving-and-medical-issues>

DVLA Medical Enquiries
Telephone: 0300 790 6808

<https://www.mygov.scot/prescription-drugs-driving-scotland/>