

RSA

NDLS

National Driver Licence Service

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta um Cheadúnais Tiomána

Diabetes and Driving

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



What is Diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus is a lifelong condition caused by a lack of insulin in your body. Insulin is a hormone that regulates blood glucose (sugar). If some of the treatments for diabetes (particularly insulin and certain types of the tablets) are not managed properly, this can cause 'hypoglycaemia' – low blood sugar levels. An episode of hypoglycaemia is sometimes called 'a hypo'.

Hypoglycaemia makes you feel unwell and can affect your ability to drive safely. If you suffer a severe hypo, it means you need someone to help you – you could become dizzy or drowsy and you need to get your sugar levels under control. In severe cases, you could lose consciousness. The risk of a hypo is the main danger to safe driving for people with diabetes. The risk increases the longer you are on insulin treatment.

If you get warning symptoms of a hypo whilst driving, you must always stop as soon as it is possible to do so safely. Do not ignore the warning symptoms.

Note: You are committing an offence if you carry on driving after you become aware that you are not fit to do so. 'Awareness' can be your own awareness – that is, things you notice yourself without being diagnosed by a doctor. Awareness can also be as a result of a warning not to drive from your doctor.

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.

Why is it important that 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.

What are the early warning symptoms of Hypoglycaemia?

The early symptoms include:

- sweating
- shakiness or trembling
- feeling weak or hungry
- fast pulse or palpitations
- anxiety
- tingling lips

If you do not get treatment for these early signs, you may experience more severe symptoms such as:

- slurred speech
- difficulty concentrating
- confusion
- disorderly or irrational behaviour, which may be mistaken for drunkenness

If left untreated, you could lose consciousness.

Managing insulin-treated diabetes and driving

Drivers with insulin-treated diabetes are advised to take the following precautions to manage their condition and drive safely.

Carry

Always carry your glucose meter and blood glucose strips with you. You must check your blood glucose before driving and every two hours whilst driving. Also, always carry **personal identification** to show that you have diabetes in case of injury in a road traffic accident.

Measure

Blood glucose is measured in 'millimoles per litre' and is written as mmol/l. If your blood glucose is 5.0 mmol/l or less, have a snack. If it is less than 4.0 mmol/l or you feel hypoglycaemic, do not drive. Take appropriate action. Retest to ensure your blood glucose is above 5.1 mmol/l.

Stop

If you develop hypoglycaemia while driving, stop your vehicle as soon as possible.

Wait

Switch off the engine, take the keys out of the ignition, and move from the driver's seat. **Do not drive again until 45 minutes after your blood glucose level has returned to normal.** It takes up to 45 minutes for the brain to recover fully.

Keep

Keep an emergency supply of fast-acting carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or sweets, within easy reach in your vehicle.

Take

Always take regular meals, snacks and rest periods at least every two hours on long journeys.

Avoid

Always avoid alcohol.

Important

Please make sure that your meter displays the correct time and date so that you have a record.

Interstitial glucose monitoring systems

These devices are more widely known as real-time continuous glucose monitoring systems (RT-CGM).

The reliance on alarms on these glucose monitoring devices are not accepted as a substitute for adequate awareness of hypoglycaemia experienced by the driver. Should a driver become reliant on these alarms to advise them that they are hypoglycaemic they must stop driving, contact the service providing care for their diabetes and should notify NDLS.

These systems may be used for monitoring glucose at times relevant to driving Group 1 vehicles (cars and motors bikes). Users of these systems must carry finger prick capillary glucose testing equipment for driving purposes as there are times when a confirmatory finger prick blood glucose level is required.

If using an interstitial fluid continuous glucose monitoring system, the blood glucose level must be confirmed with a finger prick blood glucose reading in the following circumstances:

- when it indicates that the glucose level is 4.0 mmol/L or below

- when symptoms of hypoglycaemia are being experienced
- when the glucose monitoring system gives a reading that is not consistent with the symptoms being experienced (for example, symptoms of hypoglycaemia and the system reading does not indicate this)

RT-CGM interstitial fluid glucose monitoring systems are not acceptable means of compliance for the purposes of Group 2 driving and licensing

Driver Guidelines

Group 1 – Driving a car, motor cycle or tractor

If you are a Group 1 driver, you must inform NDLS if:

- you suffer more than one episode of severe hypoglycaemia (where you need someone to help you) within the last 12 months.

Group 2 – Driving a bus or truck

If you are a Group 2 driver, you must inform NDLS if:

- you suffer **one** episode of severe hypoglycaemia;
- your medical team feels you are at high risk of developing hypoglycaemia;
- you begin to have difficulty in recognising warning symptoms of low blood sugar (impaired awareness of hypoglycaemia);
- you suffer severe hypoglycaemia while driving;
- an existing medical condition gets worse, or you develop any other condition that may affect safe driving.

If you are a Group 1 **or** Group 2 driver applying for, or renewing your licence, or if you have been diagnosed with diabetes, **you must inform NDLS if:**

- you are treated by insulin, or if your diabetes is managed by tablets which carry a risk of inducing hypoglycaemia (bringing on a hypo attack), for example sulphonylureas. (Ask your doctor whether you are on sulphonylureas or other medications which carry a risk of inducing hypoglycaemia.)
- you develop any problems with your circulation or sensation in your legs or feet which makes it necessary for you to drive certain types of vehicles only (for example, automatic vehicles or adapted vehicles).

If you are on temporary insulin treatment, you should consult with your doctor as to whether or not you must notify the NDLS.

There is no need to notify the NDLS if your diabetes is managed by diet alone, or only by medications which do not carry a risk of inducing hypoglycaemia.

Diabetes and eyesight

- Diabetes may affect your eyesight. You should have an eye test at least every year carried out by a doctor or optometrist or orthoptist. They might recommend that you have more frequent tests at regular intervals. These tests should be a full examination including the back of the eye.

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 or ignore early warning symptoms, and evidence is found of this, it will affect your insurance, and 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.

In the case of new onset of insulin-treated diabetes between driving licence renewals, driver does not need to inform NDLS if less than 3 years remaining on current licencing: if more than 3 years remaining on licence, should inform NDLS.

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 GP or nurse.
- Diabetes Ireland is a valuable source of support and information.

Web: www.diabetes.ie

Helpline: 01 8428118

Email: info@diabetes.ie



National Driver Licence Service

May 2025