

Strong painkillers and driving

Information for patients

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. The drowsiness may go away once you have been on the same dose for a few days. Other medicines you may be taking as well can make drowsiness worse (such as anti-sickness medicines and other drugs used for pain, e.g. 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 illness is 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 specified levels in the body, whether your driving is impaired or not. However, if you are above the specified limit you will not commit the new offence if your driving is not impaired, and you are taking your medicine in accordance 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, that are sometimes abused, that 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 used to treat pain – opiate/opioid based medication will metabolise (chemically change) into morphine and show in a blood result
- ♦ diazepam, clonazepam, flunitrazepam, lorazepam, oxazepam, or temazepam; used to treat anxiety or inability to sleep
- ♦ methadone used to treat drug addiction;
- ♦ Amphetamine; used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and 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 and therefore 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 ask your doctor or pharmacist. Your doctor may be able to sort out any driving problem by changing your medicine. 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 illness 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 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® 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 impaired such as experiencing sleepiness, poor co-ordination, impaired or slowed thinking, dizziness, or visual problems.
- × DO NOT drive after your dose of long-acting (controlled release) strong painkiller has been increased (e.g. MST continus®, Morphgesic®, fentanyl patch, Oxycontin®, Longtec®) until you are accustomed 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.

Useful contact details: DVLA Tel No. 0300 790 6806

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

<http://www.gov.uk/dvla-medical-enquiries>

<http://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>.