



Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre  
Road Safety Authority



# Driving for Work - Driver Health Guidelines





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# 1. Introduction

The aim of these guidelines is to make working drivers more aware of the main health issues that may affect them and, consequently, to improve their ability to drive safely. Driving by its nature is not the healthiest occupation as long periods are spent seated in the same position with little or no opportunity for physical activity. The following information will help drivers look after and improve their health. You'll find a brief description of the most common health issues affecting working drivers with details of websites with more comprehensive information on each topic.



# 2. Fitness to Drive

You need to be both physically and mentally fit to drive. Your physical health, psychological and emotional state and your general attitude towards driving play a major part in your fitness to drive. You should inform your employer about any health issue or personal circumstance that may affect your driving. It is important to remember that your fitness to drive can be affected by:

- a. **Fatigue**
- b. **Medical fitness**
- c. **Stressful events**
- d. **Eyesight**
- e. **Alcohol**
- f. **Drugs**
- g. **Temporary illnesses**
- h. **How you look after your health**

We will look at each of these issues in more detail.



## a. Fatigue



Fatigue is the decline in mental and/or physical performance that results from prolonged exertion, lack of quality sleep or disruption to the body's circadian or clock rhythms. It is a feeling of tiredness and being unable to work effectively. A fatigued person will be less alert and perceptive, less able to process information and will have slower reaction times than someone who is not fatigued. A driver who is fatigued may nod off momentarily while driving with very serious consequences.

Fatigue results from an imbalance between work and life demands, as well as 'rest' and 'recovery' periods. Fatigue can lead to errors and collisions. Chronic fatigue built up over a period of time is associated with stomach and heart illnesses.

### ***Driver fatigue***

Fatigue is a major contributory cause of fatal and serious vehicle collisions and incidents. Many vehicle incidents and collisions are caused annually by tired drivers. They are usually severe because a driver who has nodded off momentarily cannot brake or take avoidance action while driving at speed.

You are most likely to feel sleepy when driving:

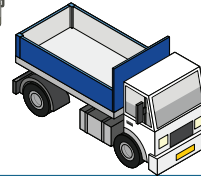
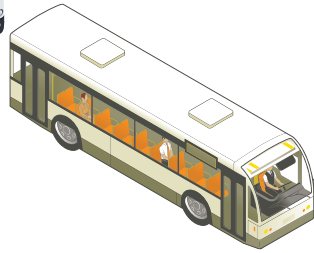
- if you have not had a good night's sleep the night before
- if you have a sleep disorder such as insomnia or sleep apnoea
- if you have had less sleep than normal
- on journeys home after a night shift
- on long journeys
- on journeys after a long working day
- at night time and in the early morning hours
- after taking medicines which cause drowsiness

### ***Driver fatigue warning signs***

There are a number of early warning signs for driver fatigue such as:

- difficulty concentrating
- lane drifting





- yawning
- eyes rolling and head drooping
- eyes closing momentarily
- nodding off

### Measures to tackle driver fatigue

<p>Make sure you are well rested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have a sleep disorder get medical attention</li> <li>• Try and get a good night's sleep before a long journey</li> <li>• Lack of sleep over a period of time can result in a sleep deficit which could cause you to nod off while driving</li> <li>• If you are continually tired, discuss it with your doctor</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid the most dangerous driving times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible do not drive at night or in the early morning hours</li> </ul>
<p>Reduce your driving time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take regular breaks every 2 hours on long journeys</li> <li>• Follow safe or legal limits on maximum driving distances and journey times</li> <li>• Comply with tachograph rules if you are subject to them (HGV and bus drivers)</li> </ul>
<p>If you feel tired</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop in a safe location</li> <li>• Take a caffeine drink and have a short rest or nap for 15 to 20 minutes</li> <li>• If necessary sleep overnight</li> </ul>
<p>Discuss concerns with your manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are concerned about your driving hours, journeys, or schedules (including any planned training) or if you feel tired when driving, discuss these with your manager</li> </ul>

## b. Medical Fitness



All drivers are required to be medically fit for driving. This applies both to drivers using their own private vehicles and commercial or professional drivers. Drivers are classified as either Group 1 or Group 2. Group 1 includes motor cars for private use, motor cycles and tractors. Group 2 includes vans, trucks and buses used for professional and commercial use. Vehicles in Group 2 are regarded as a higher risk which requires a higher standard of physical and mental fitness on the part of the driver.

### ***Medical Fitness to Drive Guidelines***

The Road Safety Authority (RSA) in conjunction with the National Programme Office for Traffic Medicine are producing comprehensive guidelines on medical fitness to drive for both Group 1 and Group 2 drivers.

The information in these guidelines is intended to assist doctors and other healthcare professionals in advising their patients on fitness to drive, requirements for reporting to the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS) and guidance on review of stability, progression or improvement of these conditions. The guidance should be used by health professionals when:

- treating any patient who holds a driver licence whose medical condition may impact on their ability to drive safely
- undertaking an examination at the NDLS where an applicant for a license discloses a medical condition or license renewal of an older driver

The roles and responsibilities of drivers, health professionals and the NDLS are outlined in the guidance.

### ***Medical Report Form D501***

When applying for a driver licence to the NDLS for the first time or when applying for a renewal licence, your application must be accompanied by a medical report form D501 if you:

- are applying for a Group 2 driving licence (categories C, C1, CE, C1E, D, D1, DE, D1E)
- will be 70 years of age or more on the first day of the period for which the licence is being granted
- suffer from one or more of the of the listed disabilities or diseases e.g. epilepsy, diabetes
- are taking drugs or medications on a regular basis which would be likely to cause the driving of a vehicle by you to be a source of danger



In these situations you are required to undergo a medical examination by a doctor who will complete the medical report form D501.

The completed form will indicate:

- whether you are fit or unfit to drive
- the groups of vehicles you are fit to drive
- the period in years you are fit to drive
- whether any adaptations to the vehicle are required because of a physical disability you have
- whether you have a limb prosthesis/orthesis
- whether you need to wear corrective lenses



### ***Patient Advisory Form***

If you develop a medical condition which may impact on your fitness to drive in the intervening period between a renewal licence, your doctor may advise you by sending you a completed Patient Advisory Form to contact the NDLS to let them know of the condition. It is likely that the NDLS will then require you to provide a completed form D501.

**More information at [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)**

### **c. Stressful Events**



Stress is a negative state, which involves to varying degrees, anxiety, fear and agitation. It comes about when a demand being placed on a person by a situation, a relationship or a specific task is not easily or properly met.

All areas of life can cause stress. Stress mainly comes from personal issues such as loss or threat of loss, fear and feelings of helplessness. Family traumas, relationship problems, financial worries and bereavement are amongst the most frequently cited causes of stress. Driving is often cited as being stressful where traffic, weather, deadlines and rushing all combine to make a driver stressed.

Stress gives rise to varying reactions from confusion to anger. Stress also causes changes in hormonal and cardiovascular activity, which affects physical wellbeing. Increases in cortisone in the blood from a stressful situation raises blood pressure and can contribute to disturbing body sensations such as sweating, dry mouth, breathlessness and thumping heartbeat. Stress can result in a combination of mental and physical symptoms such as sleeping difficulties leading to fatigue, and decrease or increase in appetite.

It is important to be aware of your own physical reactions to stress so that you can learn to control the bodily symptoms, understand and rationalise what is happening to you and try to reverse or control the dynamics.

The best way to deal with stress is to prevent it arising in the first place, as well as learning ways to recognise it and cope with it. For instance, increases in episodes of road rage may mean you should take time out and try to reflect on what are the other issues underlying your anger at other drivers. It is usually not just about 'other drivers' but about some frustration in your own mind. You can improve your ability to cope when it does arise by recognising it and being honest with yourself, resting, relaxing, reflecting and adopting new ways of calming yourself and finally recovering from stressful times when it is unavoidable. If possible avoid those situations that cause you high levels of stress and minimise contact with stressful places, people and events.

Of course, it is preferable not to drive at all when in a heightened state of stress. When you are stressed your usual range of abilities and skills are diminished. Stressed people drive faster, with less care and attention and with higher levels of risk taking behaviour than non-stressed people. If you are upset, traumatised or angry do not drive. If you have to drive, concentrate more than ever on the road and the mechanics of driving. Wait until you arrive at your destination or finish your work to resolve the stress.

**More information at [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)**

#### **d. Eyesight**



A driving licence holder or applicant must meet certain vision standards for driving as outlined in the Medical Fitness to Drive guidelines (Group 1 and Group 2). In many instances, this means the driver has to wear corrective lenses when driving. In addition there are a number of visual disorders which may place limitations on the driver's ability to drive safely. The requirements for Group 2 drivers are more onerous than for Group 1 drivers.

You should have your eyes tested ideally at least every 2 years by an optometrist or optician. If you have to wear prescription glasses or contact lenses for driving, make sure you always wear them when driving. Keep the glasses clean and scratch free. It is a good idea to carry a spare pair of glasses in your car and also a pair of sunglasses (whether prescription or not) to reduce the effects of sun glare.

**More information at [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)**



## e. Alcohol



Drink drivers kill and injure many people every year. The consumption of alcohol impairs judgement, makes drivers over confident and more likely to take risks. Alcohol slows down reaction times, increases stopping distances, impairs judgement of speed and distance and reduces the field of vision. Just one drink could be sufficient to impair driving.

In Ireland, the legal drink drive limit is 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. There is a lower limit of 20mg for professional (Group 2) and learner drivers. To get an idea of what this means in relation to consumption, we talk of standard drinks or units. One standard drink is 10 grams of alcohol. Your liver can only process roughly one standard drink per hour. One standard drink equates to ½ pint (284ml) of stout/lager/cider, a small glass of wine (100ml) or one small pub measure of spirits (35.5ml).

For the average male, one standard drink equates to roughly 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. There is however a significant difference between individuals depending on your age, weight and gender and equating blood alcohol levels in relation to units of alcohol consumed is an inexact science. If a person drank four pints of beer, it would take roughly eight hours before the body was alcohol free. Clearly if you were drinking late at night, you could still be over the legal limit when driving early the next morning. Even if you are not over the limit, the presence of alcohol in the body combined with tiredness due to poor quality sleep as a result of drinking can impair driving.

The best advice is never ever drink and drive. If you drink at night and you are driving the following morning, only drink a small amount and make sure you have had at least eight hours sleep.

Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to a number of health problems including dependence and addiction, mood changes, stomach ulcers, and liver disease (fatty liver, alcohol hepatitis and cirrhosis). The recommended weekly low risk limit is 17 standard drinks for men and 11 for women with a number of alcohol free days each week.

**More information at [www.drinkaware.ie](http://www.drinkaware.ie)**



## f. Drugs



### (i) Medicines

There are many prescribed and over the counter medicines that can make you feel drowsy and fatigued, impair your cognitive functioning or affect your emotional state. These include sleeping tablets, anti-depressants, tranquillisers, some medicines for allergies and hay fever and even some cough and cold remedies. Certain prescription and over the counter medicines may impair judgment and make drivers over confident and more likely to take risks.

Also if different medicines are taken together, they may result in unwelcome side effects, so check with your pharmacist before combining over the counter medicines.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist whether the medicine you are taking is likely to affect your driving. If so, ask for an alternative that does not affect your driving or avoid driving altogether. Always check the label on the container and the patient information leaflet for any warnings.



### (ii) Illicit Drugs

Illicit drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy can affect drivers in different ways such as slower reaction times, aggressive behaviour, poor concentration, panic attacks and paranoia. Also as the effects of these drugs wear off, the driver may feel extremely fatigued. It is illegal to possess these drugs and they should not be taken. The best advice is not to drive if you are under their influence.

More information at [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

## g. Temporary Illnesses



Common conditions such as colds, flu, migraine, stomach upsets and hay fever can affect your ability to drive safely. For example, the symptoms of a cold, (headache, runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, blocked sinuses and tiredness) if severe enough can impair your concentration, vision, reactions and judgement.

You can be tempted to soldier on when it would be safer not to drive until you are feeling better. If you start to feel ill while driving, stop the vehicle in a safe location. If the condition is not serious, you may feel well enough to continue after a short break, a warm drink or taking some medication. However if you feel you are unfit to drive, do not drive. Contact your line manager to explain the situation and allow alternative arrangements to be made.

## h. How You Look After Your Health

### (i) Common Health Conditions

There are a number of health conditions that affect a sizeable proportion of the population including those who drive for work. These conditions can seriously take away from your enjoyment of life and also impair your ability to drive. Driving for work by its nature does not lend itself easily to a healthy lifestyle due to long hours seated in the one position, irregular hours of work, lack of opportunities for exercise and poor eating options. However, this is not an excuse for poor health. The good news is that by making some simple changes and sticking to them, most of these conditions can be prevented and you can live a long, healthy, active life.



Over 200,000 people in Ireland have diabetes while others have the condition but are unaware that they have it. Diabetes is a chronic condition whereby the body is not able to regulate the glucose (sugar) levels due to abnormal metabolism. This results in constant high levels of glucose in the blood stream. There are two main types of diabetes.

Type 1 Diabetes	Type 2 Diabetes
Is less common	Is much more common
The body is not able to make insulin on its own to manage blood glucose (sugar levels)	The body does not produce enough insulin to manage blood glucose levels and /or the cells in the body cannot use it correctly
Usually affects children and young adults	Mainly effects adults
Insulin injected daily to control blood sugar levels and restricted diet	Usually treated with tablets and /or diet changes

Low blood sugar (Hypoglycaemia) arises as a consequence of failure to match food consumption, exercise and insulin in Type 1 Diabetes. It can also arise in Type 2 Diabetes but less often. Symptoms of low blood sugar are:

- sweating
- shaking
- slurred speech
- irrational behaviour

Diabetes can be treated and managed with insulin or tablets or both. In many cases diabetes is preventable and common risk factors are age, weight, body fat distribution and lack of physical exercise.

More information at [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie)



Heart disease is the biggest cause of death in Ireland annually (5000 deaths). Heart disease is a general term to describe a number of short term and long term medical conditions that affect the heart. Drivers can suffer from heart disease due to the sedentary nature of the job and other risk factors such as poor diet and stress.

**Cardiac arrest:** the heart stops pumping blood around the body resulting in unconsciousness. Immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation using an AED are needed. Contact the emergency services immediately for treatment by dialling 999 or 112.

**Heart attack:** the blood supply to a part of the heart muscle is suddenly cut off due to a blood clot. Symptoms include chest pain, shortness of breath and nausea. Contact the emergency services immediately for treatment by dialling 999 or 112.

**Coronary heart disease** is the most common long term condition is and this is the leading cause of death. Plaque builds up over time inside the linings of the blood vessels of the heart, obstructing the supply of oxygen rich blood to the heart muscle. Angina is a symptom of coronary heart disease.

In many cases heart disease is preventable and common risk factors are age, smoking, high blood pressure and cholesterol, obesity and diabetes. Other risk factors include poor diet, lack of physical exercise, excessive alcohol consumption and stress.

More information at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



Stroke is the third biggest cause of death in Ireland annually (2000 deaths). A stroke occurs when the blood flow to the brain is interrupted, usually because a blood vessel is blocked by a blood clot (80% of cases) or bursts (20% of cases). This causes damage to the brain cells due to lack of oxygen and nutrients. The brain damage can result in both physical and mental disability and in extreme cases death.

The main symptoms of a stroke are sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg (especially on one side of the body). Other symptoms may include confusion, slurred speech, dizziness and impaired consciousness.

The faster medical attention is received, the better is the chance to limit long term disability and make a recovery. Contact the emergency services immediately for treatment by dialling 999 or 112.

In many cases stroke is preventable and common risk factors are age, weight, high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, smoking, lack of physical exercise, diabetes and heart disease.

**More information at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)**



High blood pressure or hypertension is a consistently elevated blood pressure exceeding 140/90 mmHg while normal blood pressure is below 130/85 mmHg. There are few, if any, symptoms associated with high blood pressure, and the only way you can find out if you have high blood pressure is by having it measured. High blood pressure causes silent damage to the blood vessels and the heart. If untreated this damage progresses over time and may result in a stroke or heart attack.

For most people with high blood pressure, there is no demonstrable cause for the elevation of pressure, and in most cases it is genetically determined. Such people will often have a family history of high blood pressure. In a small number of people, a cause can be demonstrated with special investigations. This cause may be in the kidney or in the endocrine system, the glands that secrete the hormones controlling blood pressure, but in most people there is no cause and it is referred to as "essential" hypertension. Once diagnosed by a doctor, high blood pressure is usually treated by taking medication daily.

Evidence is growing to indicate that salt is an important factor in causing high blood pressure. People who are overweight have higher blood pressures than thin people and reducing weight helps to bring your blood pressure down. Most people with high blood pressure can lead perfectly normal lives, except for having to modify risk factors and perhaps take a tablet each day and regular physical exercise.

**More information at [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)**

## (ii) Healthy Lifestyle

We have seen that lack of physical exercise and poor diet are risk factors for major diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke. By adopting a healthy diet, taking regular exercise, not drinking too much alcohol and not smoking you greatly increase your chance of preventing any of these conditions and living a long, active, enjoyable life.

### Smoking

Smoking is a major risk factor for lung cancer, heart disease and a number of other respiratory problems. Smoking is estimated to be the cause of approximately 7,000 deaths in Ireland each year, chiefly by illnesses such as lung cancer, heart disease, stroke and emphysema. Inhalation of environmental tobacco smoke by non-smokers can also result in these conditions. Since 2002, smoking has been banned in the majority of workplaces and this includes public service vehicles and other vehicles used for transporting the public for reward. It also includes the cabs of all commercial vehicles.

More information at [www.ash.ie](http://www.ash.ie)

### Healthy eating

A balanced diet is the key to healthy eating. Eat 4 or 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Fatty and sweet foods should be avoided or kept to the minimum. Bread, cereals and pasta are okay in moderation but if you are trying to control or lose weight you need to restrict carbohydrate intake. Dairy products, meat and fish are also fine as part of a balanced diet.

Emphasis should be on smaller portion size. As water is rich in minerals and it prevents the body dehydrating, drink at least 8 cups/glasses daily. Always have a bottle of water available, especially when driving long distances.

More information at [www.nutritionandhealth.ie](http://www.nutritionandhealth.ie)







There are many health benefits associated with physical activity:

- reduces risk of heart disease
- helps control body weight
- boosts energy levels
- reduces risk of colds and flu
- makes you feel better
- improves mental wellbeing



Lack of time is the biggest reason why people avoid exercise. The daily pressures of work, commuting, home and family life can leave little time left for physical activity and exercise. However, when you think of the many benefits that physical activity brings, nobody can afford not to make time for exercise. You need to set aside 30 minutes in your day for exercise, five days a week, especially when you consider that this can be divided into two 15 minutes sessions at different times of the day.

Remember though, always start exercise at a slow pace and build intensity and frequency up gradually. The activity you choose should get your heart rate up above resting level, making you feel slightly out of breath (a brisk walk is a good example).

It does not have to be about getting 'super fit', but being regular about the exercise that you take.

You should seek medical advice before starting a vigorous physical activity programme.

**More information at [www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie)**





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### **Health & Safety Authority**

LoCall: 1890 289 389

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### **Road Safety Authority**

Moy Valley Business Park

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### **An Garda Síochána**

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