

How you can keep yourself safe driving

- Make sure that you have a substantial meal or snack, which includes carbohydrates, an hour before you plan to drive.
- Avoid long-distance journeys if you are currently struggling with an eating disorder. If this is unavoidable, make sure you take regular (i.e. hourly) breaks and have a snack or meal during this time.
- Do not drive if you feel physically unwell or experiencing any of the symptoms/conditions mentioned in this leaflet. If you have an appointment to attend, try to get a lift or taxi instead. For an appointment with the eating disorder service, you can contact us to change to a video appointment instead.
- If you aren't sure if your driving is affected by your eating disorder or not, please speak to your allocated clinician for advice.



Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

All-Age Eating Disorder Service,
Edward Street Community Base,
8 Edward Street
West Bromwich,
B70 8NN

0121 612 8301



Leaflet Control Ref: xxxx | Version: 1 | Issue Date: August 2021 |
Review Date: August 2021




Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Eating disorders and driving

Information for service users and carers



Together with you to achieve 
healthier, happier lives

What are your responsibilities?

Restrictive and purging eating disorders can affect your ability to drive in a number of ways. This leaflet is designed to help you understand how your eating disorder can affect your ability to drive.

Please use this information to consider whether you are fit to drive at the moment you your own and other people's safety.

Please seek advice from your clinical team if you are unsure whether or not you should be driving. If a doctor thinks that you are unfit to drive, they have a legal obligation to inform you not to drive. If you do not take this advice, they are also under a legal obligation to notify the DVLA.

You are required to inform the DVLA of any medical condition which affects your ability to drive safely. Hypoglycaemia, dizziness, depression, fainting and anything that impairs awareness are included in the DVLA's list of reportable conditions. If you are involved in an accident as a result of your eating disorder, you could be fined up to £1000 for not declaring this. Your insurance may also be invalid. You do not need to report your eating disorder to the DVLA if your eating disorder does not affect your ability to drive and you do not experience any of the things identified in this leaflet.

Further information is available on the DVLA website (www.gov.uk/dvla-medical-enquiries).



What affects your ability to drive?

Low weight/low BMI

At a very low weight, this will affect your ability to drive in a number of ways:

- Lack of muscle mass: lack of strength can affect your ability to physically control a vehicle
- You will be more susceptible to low blood sugars, low body temperature and electrolyte imbalances
- It has been known for patients with osteoporosis to sustain fractures while driving

There are a lot of factors which influence your ability to drive safely, so it would be impossible to have a definitive BMI at which you are unable to drive. However, **if your BMI is less than 15** then there is a strong chance your ability to drive will be compromised and for this reason we would suggest that you do not drive.

If you are experiencing any of the following, it would be suggested for you not to drive at the moment-

- Not being able to rise from lying to sitting without assistance
- Dizziness
- Being unable to make rapid decisions
- Poor concentration and/or attention
- Fainting/blacking out
- Blurred vision
- Low potassium
- Low blood glucose
- Low body temperature

Low blood sugar

Low blood sugar is caused by malnutrition or starvation and can result in slow reaction times, dizziness, fainting, trembling and seizures. All of these symptoms would be dangerous to drive with.

If you know you are at risk of low blood sugar, ensure you have a meal at least 1 hour before driving which contains a slow-releasing carbohydrate.

What affects your ability to drive?

If you are experiencing symptoms of low blood sugar, you can treat this at home to avoid becoming seriously unwell. This can be done by:

- Firstly, having sugary food or drink, e.g. chocolate, fruit juice or glucose tablets
- Within 15 minutes, follow with a slow-releasing carbohydrate— e.g. 2 slices of bread, 2 digestive biscuits, 1 medium banana or have your next meal.

Low body temperature

With an eating disorder, your heart can become weak which then affects your circulation. As a result of this, your body temperature can drop.

Low body temperature can cause confusion, weakness, loss of co-ordination and drowsiness. A low BMI or body fat percentage can exacerbate this, as your body is unable to retain heat.

Electrolyte imbalances

Potassium, calcium, magnesium and phosphate imbalances are all a danger to the heart. Dehydration, compensatory behaviours (such as laxatives or vomiting) and starvation can all reduce fluid and mineral levels in the body.

Low levels of potassium can cause tiredness, weakness and muscle twitching. In severe cases, it can cause cardiac arrest. All of these complications would make driving very dangerous.

Low blood pressure

Low blood pressure can mean that there isn't enough blood flowing to your vital organs. It can cause dizziness, blurred vision, confusion and weakness. It would not be advisable to drive with any of these symptoms.