

# Painkillers and driving

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**This leaflet gives advice on driving safely for patients regularly taking strong painkillers and sedative medication to control pain and symptoms.**

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## Can I still drive on strong painkillers?

The medicines you are taking do not automatically prevent you from driving in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>. However, some painkillers can affect the speed of your reactions or general alertness. Both the label and information leaflet will warn you that drowsiness can occur<sup>2</sup>. Since March 2015, it is an offence to drive with certain controlled drugs in your bloodstream; this includes strong painkillers such as morphine and oxycodone. There is a statutory “medical defence” for people taking the drugs as prescribed by a healthcare professional, **if their driving was not impaired**. If you have followed the advice below and feel safe to do so, it is recommended that you carry a copy of your prescription to provide documentary evidence at the time you are requested to do so by the police. If receiving such medication, or other sedative drugs, it is important that you take the following precautions:

### Do not drive:

- unless you feel 100% safe to do so;
- if you feel sleepy after taking other sedative drugs, whether or not recommended by your doctor;
- after drinking alcohol;
- after taking extra ‘rescue’ doses of a sedative painkiller, e.g. for at least 3 hours after an extra dose of morphine;
- after starting or increasing the dose of a sedative painkiller. Wait until any sleepiness wears off, generally about 5 days, but sometimes longer, before driving again.

### Restarting driving

You may try driving when you feel 100% safe to do so and you no longer feel sleepy.

It is recommended you practice first by making a short trip:

- on roads that are quiet and familiar;
- at a quiet time of day when the light is good;
- with a companion who can take over driving, if required.

If you and your companion are happy with your attentiveness, reactions and general ability, then you may start driving again. Do not tire yourself out by driving long distances. If you are in any doubt, discuss with your doctor or other health professional.

If your driving is impaired, there is no medical defence and you can still be found guilty of a driving offence.

## **Who should I inform if I want to drive while taking strong painkillers / sedative drugs?**

### **Your doctor:**

- Please ensure that your doctor is aware if you are planning to drive. They can warn you about medication that might affect the speed of your reactions or general alertness.

### **Your insurance company:**

- Each company is different so it is best to discuss your circumstances with your insurance company to be sure that you are covered, and possibly to send the company a copy of this leaflet.

Although you do not necessarily need to inform the DVLA that you are taking regular painkillers, in practice, insurance companies generally advise this. However, the DVLA do need to be informed about certain illnesses. *If in doubt, discuss with your doctor or the DVLA medical advisory helpline (0870 600 0301; with your driving licence number ready).*

## **Further advice**

For further information: <https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>

1. The law differs in other countries including Europe, so seek additional advice if travelling
2. If in doubt, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Approved at RBFT Palliative Care Governance Group and the Sue Ryder Medicine Management Group

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