Driving and Diabetes

High or low blood glucose levels in people with diabetes can sometimes affect their ability to drive safely. People with diabetes may have developed complications such as vision problems (retinopathy), heart disease or nerve damage, which also can affect driving ability. Because of this it is vital that people with diabetes know what to do in order to keep themselves, and others, safe while on the road.

Austroads, the road transport and traffic safety authority for Australia and New Zealand, has developed guidelines for medical practitioners to help assess their patients fitness to drive. Diabetes and cardiovascular disease are just two of the many conditions for which there are specific medical standards and guidelines which must be met for licensing and insurance.

Hypoglycaemia or low blood glucose can be caused by treatment for diabetes with insulin or certain diabetes tablets. This is the main concern when driving. A low blood glucose level can affect a driver’s ability to react and concentrate while driving. Low blood glucose can also cause altered or loss of consciousness which could lead to the loss of control of a vehicle.

Hyperglycaemia or high blood glucose levels can also affect driving ability as it can cause blurred vision, fatigue and decreased concentration.

**Medical Standards for Licensing**

**Private and Commercial** – A person with diabetes who is managed without medication does not need to notify the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA for NSW) and may drive without license restriction. They should be reviewed periodically by their doctor for progression of the disease

**Private** – A person with diabetes who is managed with medication (not insulin) needs to notify the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) in person. They need to be reviewed every 5 years (meeting all other Austroads criteria)

**Commercial** – A person with diabetes who is managed with medication (not insulin) needs to notify the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) in person. A conditional drivers licence may be granted subject to the opinion of the specialist, the nature of the driving task and at least an annual review (meeting all other Austroads criteria)

**Private** – A person with diabetes who is managed with insulin needs to notify the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) in person. A conditional licence may be granted subject to the opinion of the specialist/ treating doctor, the nature of the driving task and at least a 2 yearly review (meeting all other Austroads criteria)

**Commercial** – A person with diabetes who is managed with insulin needs to notify the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) in person. A conditional licence may be granted subject to the opinion of the specialist, the nature of the driving task and annual review (meeting all other Austroads criteria)

**Note:** It is not necessary to notify your insurance company when you are diagnosed with diabetes if, in your doctors opinion, you are fit to drive.
How you can ensure you drive safely with diabetes:

- If you are on insulin or certain diabetes tablets that put you at risk of hypoglycaemia, check your blood glucose level before driving, even for short trips. Even a mild hypo can affect your ability to react and concentrate. If you feel a hypo coming on, immediately pull over, stop the engine and treat the hypo. Do not attempt to treat the hypo whilst driving. Do not resume driving until you are fully recovered. Always carry ‘hypo treatment’ in your vehicle. Juice poppers, packs of jelly beans or glucose tablets fit easily into a glove box. It is advisable to also include follow up hypo foods such as a muesli bar or biscuits to prevent the hypo coming back.

- If you are driving long distances, check your blood glucose before driving and at regular intervals. Plan for regular meal breaks.

- Keep your appointments with health professionals to help you manage your blood glucose levels and prevent complications of diabetes.

Other factors that can affect your license:

- In the event of a defined hypoglycaemic episode occurring, if you are normally well controlled, you should generally not drive for 6 weeks depending on identification of the reason for the episode and a report from your specialist. In the event of a hypoglycaemic episode being associated with a car accident the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) must be notified.

- If you have been admitted to hospital for stabilisation of hyperglycaemia and ketoacidosis, you will need medical clearance before driving again.

- You may be advised not to drive if you disregard your doctors advice about your diabetes management and your blood glucose levels are poorly controlled.

Payments for Examinations and Assessments:

- Payment for examinations by Health Professionals is generally not the responsibility of the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) these costs may be redeemable by Medicare.

- In some states in respect of ‘for cause examinations’ if the referral has been requested by the Drivers Licensing Authority (RTA in NSW) the cost may be paid by the authority.

If you require further information access the Austroads website.