

Diabetes and Driving



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Diabetes and Driving

Driving is a complex skill, both physically and mentally. For people with diabetes who drive, extra precautions need to be taken to help maximize road safety. The main hazard for those who take insulin or sugar lowering medications is the unexpected occurrence of low blood sugar, but most episodes of this can be prevented.

How can having diabetes affect my driving?

In the short term, diabetes can make your blood sugar levels too high or too low. As a result, diabetes can make you:

- Feel sleepy or dizzy.
- Feel confused.
- Have blurred vision.
- Lose consciousness or have a seizure.

In the long run, diabetes can lead to problems that affect your ability to drive. Diabetes may cause nerve damage in your hands, legs and feet. In some cases, diabetes can affect your vision.

What precautions should persons with diabetes take to ensure they are safe behind the wheel?

1. **Always check your blood sugar** before you get behind the wheel and at regular intervals during long drives (do not drive if your blood sugar is less than 4 mmol/L or 70 mg/dl, or if you feel manifestations of low blood sugar).
2. **Always carry your blood sugar meter and plenty of snacks** — including a quick-acting source of sugar — with you when you drive.
3. **Pull over** as soon as you feel any of the signs of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), and check your blood sugar level.
4. **If your blood sugar is low**, eat a snack that contains a fast-acting sugar source, such as

juice, non-diet soda, hard candy, or glucose tablets. Wait 15 minutes and check your blood sugar again. Make sure it is at your target range before you resume driving.

5. Most people with diabetes experience warning signs of low blood sugar. However, **if you experience hypoglycemia without advance warning, you should not drive**. Talk to your healthcare team and do not resume driving until awareness has been reestablished.
6. In extreme situations, high blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia) may affect your ability to drive. Talk to your healthcare team if you have a history of very high sugar levels to determine at what point such levels might affect your ability to be a safe driver.
7. Always wear a diabetes medical bracelet or other form of ID to notify first responders and medical professionals of the appropriate action to preform when you are unable to speak for yourself.

Associated conditions that may affect your ability to drive:

1. Vision: Have your eyes checked every 12 months, or as recommended by your doctor.
2. Lack of sleep: Sleep apnea and snoring problems are more common in people with type 2 diabetes, particularly if the person is overweight. Sleep apnea can cause excessive daytime drowsiness and loss of concentration while driving. Talk to your doctor if you experience, or think you might be experiencing, sleep apnea.
3. If your feet or legs are numb or painful, or if you have trouble feeling the pedals when you drive, promptly seek advice from your doctor or podiatrist.