

Functional Conditions Fact Sheet for Medical Professionals



Functional Impairment

Effect on Driving

Sensory Impairments

- Tingling, numbness, and loss of position sense in extremities that affects the ability to feel, grasp, manipulate, or release objects.

- Momentary loss of control of the vehicle.
- Improper or delayed signal to other drivers that the vehicle is turning, changing lanes, slowing, or stopping.
- Misapplication of the pedals and confusing the brake with the accelerator.
- Difficulty stopping the vehicle.
- Inability to control the vehicle's lane position and turning motion.

Strength

- Inability to consistently maintain a firm grip on objects.
- Inability to apply consistent pressure to objects with legs and feet.
- Weakness or paralysis of muscles affecting the ability to maintain sitting balance.
- Weakness or paralysis in extremities affecting the ability to feel, grasp, manipulate, or release objects.

- Inability to safely control the vehicle's lane position and turning motion.
- Improper or delayed signal to other drivers that the vehicle is turning, changing lanes, or stopping.
- Inability to adjust high-beam headlights when necessary.
- Difficulty or inability to maintain consistent speed or stop the vehicle.
- Loss of vehicle control due to driver falling to one side during turns or other sudden motions.

Flexibility

- Rigidity and/or limited range of mobility in neck, torso, arms, legs, or joints.

- Difficulty controlling, turning, or stopping a vehicle.
- Failure to, or delay in, use of appropriate signals for turning, changing lanes, or stopping.
- Difficulty maintaining lane position and consistent speed.
- Difficulty turning the head to check the blind spot prior to a lane change, and to observe vehicles or pedestrians entering the roadway or when merging.

Motor Planning and Coordination

- Difficulty and slowness in initiating movement.
- Vertigo, dizziness, loss of balance, or other motor planning conditions.
- Involuntary muscle movements.
- Loss of muscle control.

- Difficulty controlling, turning, or stopping a vehicle; failure to, or delay in, use of appropriate signals for turning, changing lanes, or stopping.
- Difficulty maintaining lane position, consistent speed, or safe control for long distances.
- Delay in responding to the position of other vehicles that are changing lanes, are in the oncoming lane of traffic, or are entering the roadway.
- Delay in responding to changing traffic control devices or conditions.



Clinician's Role

While any condition that affects the upper or lower limbs, the neck, or the back can have an effect on safe driving, it is possible to modify and adapt a vehicle to accommodate a physical limitation. The clinician should assess the extent of the physical and psychomotor limitations and determine whether further functional evaluation is indicated. If there are any doubts about the capacity of the driver to perform tasks in an unmodified vehicle, make a referral to a driving professional for assessment and rehabilitation.

With impairments such as those described above, there are no generalized rules such as “if you have X, you may not drive for three weeks.” Each case must be assessed taking into consideration the individual characteristics of the person involved.