

Physical Limitations Fact Sheet for Medical Professionals



Physical Limitations

Pain and decreases in motor strength or physical functioning associated with any physical limitation can affect driver safety. Common conditions in this category include:

- » Arthritis;
- » Amputation;
- » Cerebral Vascular Accident (Stroke);
- » Multiple Sclerosis;
- » Parkinson's Disease; and
- » Spinal Cord Injury.

Impact on Driving

Any condition that affects the upper or lower limbs, the neck, and back can impact the ability to drive. People suffering from these conditions along with anyone who has lost (or lost the use of) one or more extremities should contact a driver rehabilitation specialist. These specialists can prescribe vehicle adaptive devices or adaptations to limb prostheses, and train the patient in their use. For any adaptive device, driving should be restricted until the driver demonstrates safe driving ability.

The use of prosthetic limbs on vehicle foot pedals, however, is unsafe because there is no sensory feedback (i.e., pressure and proprioception). For these drivers, specialized hand controls in place of pedals are required.

A driver rehabilitation specialist can also help a driver with immobilization of wrist, hand, or fingers, which makes it difficult to manipulate the controls and steering wheel. Adaptive devices can alleviate these control issues.

For temporary conditions where the driver has a limb in a cast or other immobilizing device, it can take time to reach a level of functioning needed for safe driving.

Clinician's Role

Refer patients who have lost the use of a limb to a driver rehabilitation specialist. Without an evaluation, the driver might continue driving a vehicle without modifications, creating a potentially dangerous situation.

Advise drivers with a temporary acute injury (fractures, dislocations) or a post-surgical situation, to refrain from driving as long as the immobilization is in place or until there is full mobility.

Assess the extent of the physical and psychomotor limitations and determine the need for further functional evaluation. Refer the person to an occupational therapist or driving specialist if there are any doubts about the capacity of the driver to perform the tasks required for driving safely.

Source: *Driver Fitness Medical Guidelines, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 811 210, September 2009; Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, American Medical Association and NHTSA, 2nd Edition, 2010.*