

Driving When You Have Diabetes

You have been a safe driver for years. For you, driving means freedom and control. As you get older, changes in your body and your mind can affect how safely you drive.

When you have diabetes, your body is unable to keep your blood sugar (glucose) levels in your normal range. This means your levels may be too high or too low. But you may not recognize early symptoms of this disease. Without proper treatment, diabetes can make it harder for you to drive safely.

How Can Diabetes Affect the Way I Drive?

Diabetes can make you:

- Feel sleepy or dizzy.
- Feel tired or irritable.
- Feel confused or disoriented.
- Have blurry vision.
- Lose consciousness.
- Have a seizure.

Uncontrolled diabetes also can cause nerve damage. This will make it hard for you to feel your legs, feet, hands, or arms. You may not be able to press the brake pedal fast enough to avoid a crash. In severe cases, diabetes can even cause blindness or result in amputation.

What Should I Do if I Have Any of These Signs?

The first thing you should do is talk with your family and your health care provider. Together, you can find the best treatment plan that will allow you to continue to drive safely.

Do not drive if your blood sugar (glucose) level is dangerously low, a condition called *hypoglycemia*.

- Low blood sugar can make it hard to make good choices, focus on your driving, or control your car. Work with your health care provider to figure out when and how often you should check your blood sugar level *before you drive*.

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- Always keep your blood glucose testing meter and plenty of snacks with you. As soon as you feel any signs that your blood sugar has dropped, pull your car over and check your level. If your blood glucose level is too low, eat or drink a snack that contains sugar, such as juice, soda (not diet), hard candy, or sugar tablets. Wait 15 minutes, and then check your level again. If it is in your normal range, eat a nourishing snack or meal that contains protein.
- Do not start driving again until your blood sugar has returned to your normal level.
- If you have hypoglycemia but do not have any warning signs, do not drive. Talk with your health care provider.

Do not drive if your blood sugar (glucose) level is dangerously high, a condition called *hyperglycemia*.

- If you had very high glucose levels in the past, talk with your health care provider. Your provider can determine when and how your high levels can affect your ability to drive safely.
- Very high blood sugar can prevent you from thinking clearly and making sound judgments.
- Hyperglycemia can cause a seizure.

Diabetes also can cause eye problems. To help prevent these problems:

- Control your blood glucose levels.
- Control your blood pressure.
- Take care of your eyes.
- Get a yearly eye examination.

What Can I Do When Diabetes Affects My Driving Safety?

It is important to know how diabetes is changing your driving safety. If you have long-term complications of diabetes, such as vision or sensation problems, or if you have had an amputation, two types of specialists can help you:

- **A *driver rehabilitation specialist*** can test how well you drive on and off the road. This specialist also can help you decide when you need to stop driving. To find a driver rehabilitation specialist, go to www.aota.org/olderdriver. Under “Driving & Community Mobility,” click the button in the center of the page marked “Search for a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.” This will link you to a national database. There you can search for names and addresses of local driver rehabilitation specialists.

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- ***An occupational therapist with special training in driving skills assessment and remediation.*** To find an occupational therapist in your area, contact local hospitals and rehabilitation facilities.

What Can I Do If I Have To Limit or Stop Driving?

Even if you have to limit or give up driving, you can stay active and do the things you like to do.

First, plan ahead. Talk with family and friends about how you can shift from driver to passenger.

Below are some ways to get where you want to go and see the people you want to see:

- Rides with family and friends.
- Taxis.
- Shuttle buses or vans.
- Public buses, trains, and subways.
- Walking.
- Para transit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities). Some offer door-to-door service.

Take someone with you. You may want to have a family member or friend go with you when you use public transportation or when you walk. Having someone with you can help you get where you want to go without confusion.

Find out about transportation services in your area. Some areas offer low-cost bus or taxi service for older people. Many community-based volunteer programs offer free or low-cost transportation.

Where Can I Get Help With Transportation?

To find transportation services in your area, visit www.eldercare.gov or call the national ElderCare Locator at **800-677-1116**, and ask for your local Office on Aging.

If you have a disability, check out Easter Seals Project ACTION at www.projectaction.org, or call **800-659-6428**. This project works with the transportation industry and the disability community to give people with disabilities more ways to get around.

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Where Can I Learn More About Diabetes?

First, talk with your health care provider.

For more information, contact:

- **AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION:** www.diabetes.org, 800-342-2383
- **NATIONAL DIABETES EDUCATION PROGRAM:** www.ndep.nih.gov, 888-693-6337
- **NATIONAL DIABETES INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE:**
www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov, 800-860-8747
- **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING INFORMATION CENTER:**
www.nia.nih.gov, www.nia.nih.gov/espanol, 800-222-2225
» You also can get a copy of the *Age Page on Older Drivers* from the National Institute on Aging. Call 800-222-2225, or go to www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/older-drivers.
- **NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION:**
888-327-4236, www.nhtsa.gov

**Always Wear Your Seat Belt.
Do Not Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.**