

Connecting
our communities

Am I still fit to drive?

December 2018



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Aging and safe driving

There's a great deal of misinformation around about older drivers. When compared to drivers in younger age groups, older drivers are usually more cautious, more experienced and more responsible. They are more likely to obey the law and are less likely to drink drive or speed.

Keeping yourself and others safe

Older drivers are more vulnerable to being injured or killed in a car crash. This is because our bodies become frailer as we age and less able to withstand the physical impact of a crash. In addition, some health conditions and physical changes are more common with aging and can have an impact on our driving ability.

Being alert to the health and related conditions that might affect our ability to drive safely is our best protection, and the best protection for other people on the road.

All drivers, no matter what age, should routinely consider 'am I still fit to drive?'



Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have a serious, permanent or long-term illness, disability, medical condition or injury, or an existing condition that deteriorates, you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact VicRoads to report your condition
- send VicRoads a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.

Adapting to physical and mental change

Getting older or having medical conditions doesn't mean you have to stop driving.

In Victoria, drivers are not required to pass a licence test when they reach a particular age. Retaining your driver licence is determined by your behaviour and medical fitness to drive. Driving is a privilege for everyone, which brings with it responsibilities.

There are some changes that happen with age that affect your ability to drive safely.

These changes can be physical or changes to memory and thinking. They include:

- changes to your eyesight
- changes to your memory
- hearing loss
- your ability to make decisions or react quickly when driving
- increased use of medications
- reduced mobility caused by stiffness, pain or weakness.

Often these changes happen very slowly. It is important to know what they are so you can assess how they might affect your ability to drive. This factsheet outlines steps you can take to continue to drive safely.

SARAH'S STORY

At her regular eye check, Sarah was talking to her optometrist about headlight glare while driving at night. Her optometrist said it was typical for night vision to deteriorate gradually from around the age of 40 onwards. She checked Sarah's eyes for any sign of cataracts, which can increase sensitivity to glare and bright lights, and did a full vision test.

After ruling out any major problems with her eyes, the optometrist gave Sarah the VicRoads *Am I still fit to drive?* factsheet.

Sarah learned it was common for people to reduce their night driving, just as people might decide not to drive when faced with wet or frosty road conditions. The VicRoads material helped her identify driving situations in which she felt uncomfortable and to take steps to use alternative transport rather than endure stressful driving situations—such as navigating to an unfamiliar destination at night.

She decided to ask a friend for a lift to her regular book club get-together on Thursday nights and started catching a taxi or using rideshare if she needed to go out for one-off events in the city. Her daytime driving was unchanged as she was confident in her ability to drive safely during daylight hours.



Self assessment guide

The statements in this guide are designed to help you think objectively about your current driving capability. Where you select 'Yes?', we have provided suggestions of actions you could take.

Reduced mobility	Yes?	Actions you can take
I have trouble turning my head or looking over my shoulder to check for traffic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>An occupational therapist trained in driver assessment can help you work out vehicle modifications and adjustments that will best support you. Examples of vehicle modifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reversing cameras and 'stick on' blind spot mirrors to assist when neck mobility is reduced. • Steering aids, to assist with limited arm function. • A simple exercise programme to help keep you strong and flexible. Ask your doctor or a physiotherapist for an appropriate exercise program for your health needs.
I find it hard to move my foot from the accelerator to the brake pedal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I find it hard to turn the steering wheel.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have trouble reversing my car as I find it hard to turn to look behind me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Changes to vision	Yes?	Actions you can take
When I have been looking at something close to me, it's sometimes hard to focus on things that are far away.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit your optometrist or ophthalmologist at least once every two years. Our vision changes as we age, but poor vision can often be corrected with a pair of glasses. Other conditions may require treatment or surgery to prevent further vision loss. Regular eye checks are important for all drivers. • More information about conditions affecting vision can be found on the VicRoads website.
It is getting harder to judge gaps in the traffic when I merge or turn at an intersection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I sometimes have trouble seeing road signs, lane markings, other vehicles or pedestrians.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I find it harder to see at twilight or at night.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Glare at night affects me more than it used to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Medications and general health	Yes?	Actions you can take
I take one or more medications daily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Many medications can affect your mental alertness and coordination, especially when combined with alcohol. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about how your medications may affect your driving.</p> <p>Our <i>Your health and driving</i> factsheet explains what to do if you are diagnosed with a number of health conditions. The first step is to discuss the implications for driving with your doctor.</p>
I'm unsure if the medications I take can make me sleepy or affect my driving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I sometimes drink alcohol as well as taking medications regularly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have been diagnosed with a serious or chronic health condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Driving practice	Yes?	Actions you can take
I sometimes find myself driving too slowly and holding up traffic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider booking a lesson with a driving instructor or the RACV <i>Senior driving program</i> to receive some independent, objective feedback on your driving. • Allow plenty of time for your journey and plan your route, including where you will park. • Take plenty of rests and don't drive when you are tired. • Drive less and reduce the amount of long distance driving you undertake. • Don't drive to unfamiliar places if possible. • Visit the VicRoads website for information on changes to road rules.
Other motorists sometimes 'honk' at me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Intersections bother me because there is too much to watch from all directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I find it difficult to decide when to merge with traffic on a busy highway.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I don't like driving to unfamiliar locations anymore.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I'm less confident on the roads than I used to be and feel anxious about how busy they are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I worry that I'm not keeping up with changes to the road rules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Time to plan for change	Yes?	Actions you can take
My friends or family don't want to be a passenger in my car when I'm driving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you experience any of these issues, we recommend you immediately consult your doctor who will help investigate the causes and assist you to manage your driving. • Friends or family may be nervous to raise their concerns with you. By inviting them to have a conversation, you make it easier for them to express their concerns. • Seek a formal driving assessment with an occupational therapist with training in this area. • Talk to your doctor about your concerns. • Refer to the VicRoads <i>Retiring from driving</i> factsheet for more information.
I feel upset and confused in traffic or lose my way quite often, even in familiar areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
My car now has quite a few dings and dents from minor collisions when driving or parking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I've had several traffic infringements and 'warnings' from traffic police in the last two years.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I've recently had a number of 'near misses' while driving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I've gone through a stop sign without stopping several times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Reducing risk

None of us want to be a risk on the roads—to ourselves or to others. Most drivers make adjustments themselves when they realise their driving ability is deteriorating. The first step to reducing risk is to be aware of how you are driving. The second step is to actively manage your health by regularly consulting with your doctor and eye health professionals.



Seek feedback

Ask friends or family who have observed your driving if they have noticed any changes or anything of concern (they might be glad you have raised the topic). Talk to your doctor or seek independent objective feedback by booking a driving lesson with a driving instructor who is trained to assess older driver skills—for example, as available via the RACV driving school. You can find out more in the fitness to drive section of the VicRoads website.



Monitor your health

Health problems can affect our fitness to drive at any age. Some of these health conditions require notification to the VicRoads Medical Review team. Many health problems occur gradually, and can be difficult to notice—for example, eye sight changes occur gradually, and can affect our overall wellbeing and our ability to drive safely. Regular check-ups with your doctor and eye health professional will help to identify and manage issues. You may discover that there are treatments and devices which will support you to continue driving safely.



Change behaviour

Many drivers adjust the way they drive in response to changes in abilities or confidence—for example, some drivers who find night driving difficult only drive during daylight hours. Others restrict their driving to local areas or reduce the amount of time they spend behind the wheel.

Some people decide to stop driving entirely, before they are legally required to do so. See the VicRoads factsheet *Retiring from driving* for more information.



Change or adjust your car

If your car is old, a newer one may make it easier for you to drive with confidence. More recent models include features to increase your safety.

In some circumstances, modifications or adjustments can be made to your existing vehicle. These include additional mirrors, adjustable seating, parking sensors and cameras, hand controls instead of foot pedals, and steering aids to make the steering wheel easier to turn with one arm. Some of these modifications can only be used by people with a health condition and require the successful completion of an occupational therapy driver assessment.



Talk to your doctor about your fitness to drive

It's important to ask your doctor for advice about the effect that any illness, disability or medical condition may have on your ability to drive safely. This includes the effects of any medicines you may be taking.

All Victorian licence holders have a legal responsibility to report serious, permanent or long-term illnesses, disability, medical conditions or injuries to VicRoads.

Being diagnosed with a health condition doesn't necessarily mean that you must stop driving. In most cases, managing long term serious conditions with medical support will mean you can continue to maintain your driving and mobility for longer. You may have conditions put on your licence—such as a requirement for vehicle modifications, limits on distance travelled or use of local roads, or only driving in daylight or off-peak hours. Conversely, you may be required to undergo regular medical or eyesight reviews.



VicRoads Medical Review

Once you have notified VicRoads of your medical condition or disability, VicRoads will undertake a medical review. In this process, the medical report from your doctor or other health professional will be reviewed. If you don't have a medical report, we may request that you ask a doctor who is familiar with your medical history to complete one. VicRoads does not cover any costs associated with the medical reports or health appointments.

VicRoads assesses each medical report on a case-by-case basis. If you have a medical condition that could have an impact on your driving, VicRoads may ask you to do a driver assessment with an Occupational Therapy Driver Assessor. You are responsible for the cost associated with this assessment. VicRoads will write to you if you are required to undergo one of these assessments. This request may have been recommended by your medical practitioner, Victoria Police or by someone else who has reasonable concern about your ability to drive safely.

If your medical review assessment shows you can drive safely, you will keep your driver licence/learner permit. However, depending on the assessment results, you may have specific conditions placed on your driving—for example, you may be limited to driving in daylight hours or only around your neighbourhood (refer to ***Conditions on your licence*** on the next page).

VicRoads will only suspend or cancel your driver licence/learner permit if you:

- are assessed as medically unfit to drive
- fail a driving assessment
- do not provide a medical report upon request
- refuse or fail to undergo a test.

On the VicRoads website, you can find an information bulletin about the medical review process and frequently asked questions about assessing fitness to drive.



Conditions on your licence

To help maintain your mobility, VicRoads may offer a conditional licence. This can mean the difference between giving up your licence completely, or continuing to drive in circumstances you find comfortable.

Examples of licence conditions include:

- only driving in daylight or off-peak hours
- driving within a set radius from home to enable you to drive to places you normally visit in your local area—such as shops, medical centre etc.
- driving a vehicle with modifications.

Quick links for further information

VicRoads website	RACV website
<p>vicroads.vic.gov.au</p> <p>On the VicRoads website, you can search on any of the following terms to find specific information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• occupational therapy• older drivers• A-Z of Road Rules• road rules videos• fitness to drive.	<p>racv.com.au</p> <p>Search the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• older drivers• <i>Senior driving program</i> (or telephone 1300 788 229) <p>The RACV program <i>Years Ahead</i> is a free one hour presentation on road safety for seniors available for community groups and other organisations.</p>
Seniors Information Victoria	Disabled Motorists Australia
<p>This independent service is operated by COTA Victoria (and funded by the Victorian Government) and offers free information on a wide range of issues of interest to older Victorians.</p> <p>Call 1300 135 080</p>	<p>This group aims to support drivers with disabilities to obtain transportation and motoring independence. They offer member discounts, information, referrals and support on all transport and mobility issues.</p> <p>Call (03) 9386 0413</p>

Retiring from driving

VicRoads understands the important role driving plays in keeping people connected and independent. We want people to be independent drivers for as long as they are safe. Having a medical condition does not mean a person is ineligible to hold a licence.

Eventually we will all need to stop driving. The ideal approach to retiring from driving is to gradually transition from regular driving, to using alternative transport options.

If you have concerns about someone's driving, you need to talk to them about it. Equally, if someone speaks to you about your driving, you need to listen and reflect on your own driving.

All drivers, no matter what age, should routinely consider 'am I still fit to drive?'



Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have a serious, permanent or long-term illness, disability, medical condition or injury, or an existing condition that deteriorates, you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact VicRoads to report your condition
- send VicRoads a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.

The road ahead: alternatives to driving

It's a good idea, where possible, to try out other forms of transport before you stop driving. This will make the transition from driving much smoother, and ensure you stay active and connected to your local community.

In some situations (such as a diagnosis of a serious medical condition, deterioration in eyesight, or a significant collision) there may be no option other than to stop driving immediately. In these instances, the loss of independence can be confronting and the person will need transport support from friends and family, so they can complete daily living tasks and don't become isolated.

There are lots of alternatives to driving, including taxis, rideshare services (such as Uber or Shebah), public transport, travelling with friends or family, home delivery, and for those of us still physically active, walking or riding a bicycle. Melbourne metropolitan public transport is free to Seniors Card holders travelling within two zones on Saturdays and Sundays. Most councils offer local transport solutions, including community buses or volunteer organisations that provide transport for medical appointments. See the last page of this factsheet for some options.

Self-regulation strategies

Aiming to reduce your driving over time is a good way to reduce the safety risk to yourself and others, enabling you to gradually retire from driving. This might start with not driving at night or avoiding scenarios many drivers find stressful—such as driving on busy freeways or in unfamiliar areas.

Sensible self-regulation strategies for reducing driving risk include:

- avoiding busy roads and peak hour traffic
- avoiding glare by not driving at night or into the setting or rising sun
- taking extra care when driving from shaded areas into sunlight and vice versa
- avoiding driving in bad weather—such as rain, fog or frost
- not driving on days when you are not feeling at your best or tired
- avoiding making right hand turns at intersections without traffic lights
- choosing the safest route, rather than the most direct one
- reducing the length of your drive by driving to the most convenient bus, train or tram stop.



Talking to someone about their driving

If safety is in doubt, you can't avoid a discussion about driving.

If you have concerns about someone's driving, you need to talk to them about it—whether they are a spouse, a parent, or a friend. Be open to sharing what you have observed. It's also vital to provide support and advice to people during any transition away from driving.

It is often difficult to view our own driving objectively. If someone raises concerns about your driving, it's important to listen and think about your safety and the safety of others who share the road with you.

Below are some tips to help you prepare to have a conversation with a loved one or a friend about their driving.



Prepare for the conversation

- Be sensitive. Choose a time when they are not driving and are in a relaxed environment. Be mindful that driving is often linked to a person's identity and independence, and it's important to show respect for their driving experience.
- Safety is the central message—for the driver and the safety of others. A history of safe driving should be acknowledged, but it is not a predictor of future risk of crashes. The consequences of unsafe driving and the potential impact on others are often a motivator for people to reflect on their driving.
- If you can, observe their driving and provide specific examples of what concerns you about their driving.
- Be mindful that there is a legal requirement for drivers of any age to report any serious or chronic medical conditions or disabilities to VicRoads. A list of medical conditions requiring mandatory reporting is in the factsheet *Your health and driving*.



Ask questions and listen

Ask if they have any personal concerns about their driving or situations they find uncomfortable or stressful. Medical advice may be required—such as a check-up with a doctor or an eye test—to clarify fitness to drive. Often friends or loved ones identify driving issues, as they see the driver in every day driving situations.



Take a staged approach

- Plan to have a number of conversations with them about their driving over time. The VicRoads factsheet *Aging and safe driving* can help inform these conversations.
- Aim for a transition from driving, where possible. The first step might be to limit driving to local or familiar areas, rather than to stop driving altogether. Look at the list of warning signs and medical conditions that need to be reported to VicRoads.



Offer assistance

- If the driver is willing to self-regulate their driving to reduce risk, be supportive and offer to help with transport alternatives to make this transition easier.
- It may also help to talk about activities that are important to them and plan alternative ways to get there. Behaviour change requires planning and practice; it's the most important part of a smooth transition away from driving.

Reporting a medical condition or driver

A change in health and fitness to drive can occur at any age. It is the driver's responsibility to report their condition to VicRoads.



Self-reporting medical conditions

All Victorian licence holders are required by law to notify VicRoads of any serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, medical condition or injury that may impair their ability to drive safely. To report a medical condition, complete a VicRoads medical report with your doctor and submit it using the email or postal details on the following page. Failure to report a medical condition or disability may put your safety and that of others at risk, and may jeopardise your insurance cover.



Reporting friends or family

If you have concerns about someone's driving, you should raise this directly with them first. You can also check the VicRoads website for the list of medical conditions that must be reported to VicRoads once a driver is diagnosed. If you are genuinely concerned about someone's ability to drive safely, you can post or email a letter to VicRoads, with the driver's details (e.g. name, address) and the reasons for your concern. Under Victorian law, VicRoads must investigate this information. You can remain anonymous.

People making a report in good faith are protected from legal action and VicRoads will not divulge the identity of people who make a report. Once reported, that person may be asked to undergo a medical assessment and/or a licence test, if medical opinion suggests a test is appropriate.



Reporting unknown drivers

Anyone can make a report of a potentially at-risk driver if you observe unsafe driving issues such as speeding or failing to observe stop signs, traffic lights or roundabout signs. You can notify Victoria Police with the vehicle registration number, the gender and approximate age of the driver, and the date, time, place, and description of the observed behaviour. The Police will establish who was driving at the time and notify VicRoads.



VicRoads Medical Review

Once you have notified VicRoads of your medical condition or disability, VicRoads may undertake a medical review. In this process, the medical report from your doctor or other health professional will be reviewed. If you don't have a medical report, we may request that you ask a doctor who is familiar with your medical history to complete one. Any costs associated with the medical report and health appointments are not covered by VicRoads.

VicRoads assesses each medical report on a case-by-case basis. If you have a medical condition that can have an impact on your driving, VicRoads may ask you to do a driver assessment with an Occupational Therapy Driver Assessor. You are responsible for the cost associated with this assessment. VicRoads will write to you if you are required to have one of these assessments.

If your medical review assessment shows you can drive safely, you will keep your driver licence/learner permit. However, depending on the assessment results, you may have specific conditions placed on your driving—for example, you may be limited to driving in daylight hours, or only around your neighbourhood.

VicRoads will only suspend or cancel your driver licence/learner permit if you:

- are assessed as medically unfit to drive
- fail a driving assessment
- do not provide the medical report
- refuse or fail to undergo a test.

You can find an information bulletin about Medical Review and also frequently asked questions about assessing fitness to drive on the Vicroads website.

Email: medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Post: VicRoads Medical Review, PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

Please allow up to 10 days for correspondence to be received by post.

Fax no. 9854 2307. For more information call 13 11 71.

ROBERT'S STORY

Julie's father, Robert, was living independently in country Victoria and had been driving safely for 66 years. Robert lived a couple of kilometres out of town and drove most days to the local shops. Julie received a phone call from Robert's neighbour, reporting that her dad had recently been driving erratically, and that his car had sustained some damage. The neighbour counselled Julie to 'get him off the road quickly'.

Julie knew how important driving was to her father to maintain his independence. He'd already made some changes and no longer drove long distances or at night. A couple of years ago, they had installed blind spot side mirrors on his car to alleviate difficulties turning his head. Threatening to take his keys away wouldn't be respectful; Julie knew a more gradual approach was needed, along with discussions about reducing risks and alternatives to driving.

Julie called Robert to say she was coming to visit and downloaded a driver self-assessment guide from the VicRoads website to take with her.

During the visit, Julie accompanied Robert on his morning drive to the local shops. She noticed his mobility had deteriorated, he found it difficult to get in and out of the car, and he had difficulty manoeuvring the car into and out of a parking spot.

Over the course of the weekend, Julie talked through the self-assessment guide with Robert. He said yes to quite a few of the prompts. At one point, he remarked that the local shops were busier now and he couldn't always get his 'easy' parking spot out the front. Julie reminded him that she wanted him to be safe on the road for as long as possible, but staying safe would mean making some changes to reduce his risk.

Before she left, Julie talked to her father about getting a lift to the shops with his friend Jack, and also asked Jack to check if Robert wanted to carpool sometimes.

On her next visit, Julie gave her dad information from the local council's website about alternative transport services—such as local taxis and a community bus. Robert's friend Jack was now driving him into town once a week, and Julie helped Robert book a taxi for his doctor's appointment that coming week.

After a few weeks, Robert confessed that he enjoyed the company when travelling with others, and didn't miss the stress of finding a car park. Julie asked when the car registration was due and wondered if it was worth the expense renewing it. A couple of months later, happy with his alternative options for getting around, Robert decided to save his money and retire from driving.



Quick links for further information

VicRoads website	RACV website
<p>vicroads.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Search on any of the following terms to find specific information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• medical conditions• medical report• fitness to drive• getting around without a car• self-assessment guide.	<p>racv.com.au</p> <p>Search for 'Transport options for seniors' to find a brochure about getting around on all forms of public transport, taxis and by bike.</p>
Multi Purpose Taxi Program	Victorian Community Transport Association
<p>The Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) offers half price taxi fares to Victorians with a severe and permanent disability who are experiencing financial hardship. Apply through the Taxi Services Commission: taxi.vic.gov.au</p>	<p>Find details of local community transport services operated by local volunteer groups or local councils. vcta.org.au/ct-services-contacts</p>
Traveller's Aid Companion Service	Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS)
<p>Trained volunteers meet travellers and accompany you by public transport to and from your medical, work or education appointment in central Melbourne. Call 1300 700 399 at least 48 hours in advance. Search for 'companion service' at travellersaid.org.au</p>	<p>Covers some travel and accommodation costs incurred by rural Victorians when travelling more than 100 kilometres one way for specialist medical treatment. Call 1300 737 073 or email vptas@dhhs.vic.gov.au</p>

Your car and your safety

With healthier lifestyles and better medical care, we are living longer than ever. But as we age, our bodies are more susceptible to injury and less able to cope with the impact of a crash.

Choosing the safest car you can afford will ensure it has features that can help you avoid a crash, as well as protect you if you are involved in a crash. This can make all the difference to your safety, whether you are the driver or a passenger in the vehicle.

The right car for you

Older drivers are at more risk of serious injury in a crash than all other age groups because of their increased frailty.

At 80 years of age, you are five times more likely to sustain injuries from a transport crash that will result in death when compared to 50 years of age.

The most important thing when buying a new or a used car is the vehicle's ability to protect its occupants as well as other road users. In general, it is best to buy the newest and largest car you are comfortable with and can afford, and to consider the safety features that are offered.



Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have a serious, permanent or long-term illness, disability, medical condition or injury, or an existing condition that deteriorates, you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact VicRoads to report your condition
- send VicRoads a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.



Safety features

Design and technologies now featured in cars can help to protect you in a crash and even assist to prevent a crash.

People inside a car are better protected in the event of a crash due to modern vehicle features—such as front, side and curtain airbags. All new cars since 2011 have electronic stability control (ESC) which can help to avoid a crash. Additional safety features to consider are auto emergency braking (AEB), blind spot warning systems and lane departure systems. These safety features are becoming more common and can now be found in affordable newer cars.

See the last page of this factsheet to find resources that provide more information about vehicle safety features.

Safety ratings

There are two programs in Australia that provide consumers with vehicle safety ratings:

- The Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) publishes reports on crash test results of new cars which describe how well they protect their occupants and pedestrians.
- The Used Car Safety Ratings (UCSR) provides safety comparisons of used cars based on real world crashes. The UCSR also has a category of 'Safer Picks' car models that have been found to cause less-serious injuries to other drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists in a crash and have lower risk of being involved in a crash.

Both programs use a star rating system from one to five stars: the more stars, the safer the vehicle. It is recommended to only buy a car with a five star ANCAP or UCSR rating. Information about safety ratings can be found on the TAC website [howsafeisyourcar.com.au](https://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au)



Buying a car

In general, buy a new car, or as close to a new car as you can afford. If buying a used car, ask the seller for a fully-documented service history of the vehicle. If one is unavailable, be aware there may be problems which could have an impact on your safety.



Adjusting your car

The adjustment of your car seat, mirrors and steering wheel can make a big difference to your comfort as a driver, and even more difference to your safety. Sitting in the right position in the vehicle allows the safety systems to work as they were designed. Sitting in the wrong position can reduce the effectiveness of the car's safety features.

It is important to ensure that your car is set up to suit you. Adjust the driver's seat, internal and external mirrors, and seatbelt, to ensure you are sitting comfortably and have optimal vision of your surroundings.

If you are struggling to adjust your car yourself, an occupational therapist (OT) trained in driver assessment can provide assistance. A list of OTs qualified in driver assessment can be found on the VicRoads website.

Modifying your car

Some modifications to your car might be needed if your physical requirements as a driver have changed due to a health condition or disability. In some circumstances, vehicle modifications can assist you to continue to drive safely and independently. Examples of vehicle modifications include fitting of steering aids (such as 'spinner knobs'), changes to pedals (like a left foot accelerator), exchanging foot pedals for hand controls, installing extended mirrors and assistance with access in and out of the car.

Before you have any such modifications made, it is important to seek independent, professional advice. Some of these modifications can only be used by people with a disability or health condition and require the successful completion of an occupational therapy driver assessment.

OTs specialising in driver assessment or Disabled Motorists Australia are a good place to start. See the last page of this factsheet to get in touch.



Quick links for further information

VicRoads website	TAC Car Safety Ratings
vicroads.vic.gov.au Search on the following terms to find specific information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• vehicle safety• occupational therapy driver assessment.	howsafeisyourcar.com.au
RACV Shops	Australasian New Car Assessment Program
ANCAP brochures, the <i>Used Car Safety Ratings Buyer's Guide</i> , the RACV's <i>Make the right choice: Vehicle safety advice for older drivers</i> and <i>Keeping mobile: Vehicle modifications for drivers and passengers with a disability</i> are available at all shops.	ancap.com.au
Disabled Motorists Australia	
disabledmotorists.org.au or telephone 03 9386 0413	

Your health and driving

All drivers, no matter what age, should routinely consider *'am I still fit to drive?'*

This factsheet outlines how your health, any disabilities you have and medications you take may have an impact on your driving and the VicRoads medical review process.

Many health problems occur gradually, and can be difficult to notice. It is important to have regular check-ups with your doctor to help keep track of your health and identify any issues which might have an impact on your driving.

Eye sight changes occur as we age; regular eye tests are important to ensure eye problems are detected early to prevent avoidable vision loss. Eye tests can be arranged through an optometrist, by referral to an ophthalmologist, or by speaking to your doctor.

All drivers have a legal obligation to consider fitness to drive and to report relevant conditions or disabilities to VicRoads.



Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have a serious, permanent or long-term illness, disability, medical condition or injury, or an existing condition that deteriorates, you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact VicRoads to report your condition
- send VicRoads a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.



Warning signs

Below is a list of signs to watch out for, which may indicate that it is time to talk to a doctor and possibly reduce or stop driving:

- difficulty seeing street signs, road markings and other road users
- damaging the vehicle more often, from colliding with posts, fences, etc.
- difficulty parking or incidents of 'touch' parking
- difficulty staying within the lane markings—such as driving in the gravel on the side of the road, driving down the centre of the road, or failing to drive within a single lane
- feeling anxious or difficulty coping with changed conditions like road works
- slow decision-making or reaction times; e.g. not reacting to traffic lights
- sensitivity to sun glare or the glare from car or street lights when driving at night
- mobility issues—such as hand, leg or back problems that affect your ability to control the foot pedals, steering wheel and dash board controls
- lack of judgement of distances such as driving too close to other cars
- confusion—such as driving in the wrong direction on the road
- memory problems—such as forgetting where you're going or where you've left the car
- finding it difficult to concentrate
- mixing up the accelerator and brake pedals
- friends and family members preferring not to travel in your car
- failing to observe traffic lights, stop signs, give way signs and roundabout signs
- not using your indicators
- slowing or stopping without reason in a lane of traffic
- being tooted by other drivers.

If you have identified any of these warning signs in your own driving, these are the next steps you should take:

- Make an appointment to see your doctor and/or your eye health professional to talk to them about your driving.
- Complete the **self-assessment guide in the *Aging and safe driving* factsheet, available on the VicRoads website.**
- Consider lessons from the RACV *Senior driving program* (telephone 1300 788 229). These refresher lessons offer practical solutions to help drivers maintain mobility and give you independent, objective feedback on your driving ability.

Your diagnosis and your drivers licence

It is important to ask your doctor for advice about the effect that any illness, disability or medical condition may have on your ability to drive safely. This includes the effects of any medicines you may be taking. Your doctor should apply the national Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD) guidelines.

All Victorian licence holders have a legal responsibility to report any serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, medical condition or injury to VicRoads.

Being diagnosed with a health condition doesn't necessarily mean that you must stop driving straight away. You may have conditions put on your licence to enable you to drive only in conditions that suit your capabilities—for example, limits on distance travelled or being restricted to local roads, only driving in daylight or off-peak hours, and/or a requirement to undergo routine medical or eyesight reviews.

Medical diagnosis, conditions or disabilities that may require reporting to VicRoads.

People with any of the following conditions or impairments should talk to their doctor about their fitness to drive. In some instances, diagnosis alone requires the driver to report their condition to VicRoads.

- diabetes
- dementia
- stroke
- epilepsy or seizures
- multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson's disease
- reduced vision or eye disease (cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetes)
- heart disease or heart conditions (including pacemakers)
- arthritic conditions causing pain and reduced mobility
- sleep apnoea
- hearing loss
- psychiatric conditions (including depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, manic depressive disorder)
- head or brain injury (especially with loss of consciousness)
- reduced or loss of function in limbs.

Medical Review

Once you have notified VicRoads of your medical condition or disability, VicRoads may undertake a medical review. In this process, the medical report from your doctor or other health professional will be reviewed. If you don't have a medical report, we may request that you ask a doctor who is familiar with your medical history to complete one. Any costs associated with the medical report and health appointments are not covered by VicRoads.

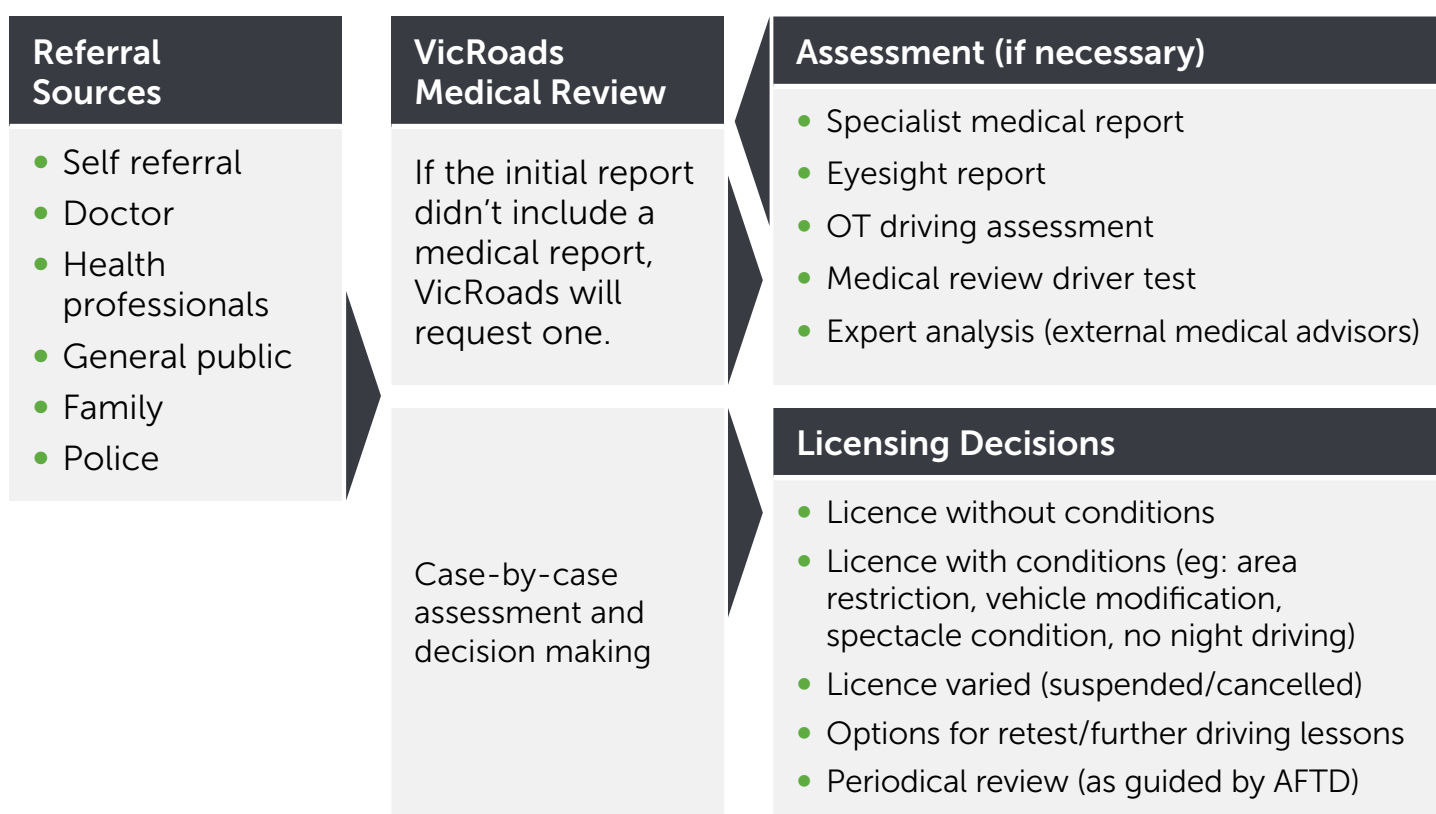
VicRoads assesses each medical report on a case-by-case basis. If you are given a medical diagnosis, or have a condition or disability that can affect your driving, VicRoads may ask you to do a driver assessment with an Occupational Therapy Driver Assessor. You are responsible for the cost associated with this assessment. VicRoads will write to you if you are required to have one of these assessments. This request may have been recommended by your doctor, Victoria Police, or by someone else who has reasonable concern over your ability to drive safely.

If your assessment shows you can drive safely, you will keep your driver licence/learner permit. However, depending on the assessment results, you may have specific conditions placed on your licence—for example, you may be limited to driving in daylight hours, or only around your neighbourhood.

VicRoads will only suspend or cancel your driver licence/learner permit if you:

- are assessed as medically unfit to drive
- fail a driving assessment
- do not provide a medical report upon request
- refuse or fail to undergo a test.

On the VicRoads website, you can find an information bulletin about Medical Review driver assessments and frequently asked questions about assessing fitness to drive.



Medications and driving

By age 75, more than three quarters of us are taking two or more medicines regularly and some of these can affect our fitness to drive. This can happen with medicines prescribed by a doctor and those bought without a prescription, such as cold and flu or hay fever medication.

To drive safely:

- you should never mix alcohol, medication and driving
- read your medicine labels carefully and obey the directions and warnings; they are there for your protection
- ask your doctor or pharmacist if medicines will affect driving, and if they do, ask if there are options for medicines that don't
- if you are likely to be affected by medicines, take public transport, a taxi, or ask a friend or relative to drive
- take your medicine exactly as directed.

A pharmacist can advise how any new medicine can interact with others you are taking. Note that impairing effects vary depending on the medicine type, your age and the dose. Always ask if it's safe to drive when taking your medicines.

Early symptoms of being affected by medicines include:

- drowsiness
- undue aggression
- dizziness
- nausea
- light-headedness
- blurred or double vision
- shakiness.



MARJ'S STORY

Six months ago Marj had a stroke. With rehabilitation support from physiotherapists and occupational therapists, she is making a good recovery and is returning to an active life again, although her right leg is slightly less coordinated and she becomes more tired than previously. She also takes medication to reduce the risk of having another stroke. Just after the stroke, Marj was advised by her doctor that she should not drive due to the effects of the stroke.

Her doctor said it was her responsibility to report the stroke to VicRoads as it may affect her ability to drive safely. Marj was worried about this, fearing that she would lose her licence for good, but she understood it was her obligation. Her doctor filled out the VicRoads medical report and Marj sent it in to the VicRoads Medical Review team. She received a letter back advising that her licence had been suspended until she could provide medical evidence that she had recovered enough to be considered for a driver assessment. Marj's doctor completed another medical report to say that she was medically fit to return to driving, but she should have an occupational therapy driver assessment to see whether the reduced coordination in her right leg and her increased tiredness affected her driving.

During the driving assessment with the occupational therapist, the slightly reduced coordination in her right leg did not affect her ability to accelerate and brake safely and she was able to concentrate well for the assessment without getting tired. She therefore passed the driving assessment but decided to have a couple of driving lessons to boost her confidence about being back on the road.



Quick links for further information

VicRoads website	RACV website
<p>vicroads.vic.gov.au</p> <p>On the VicRoads website you can search on any of the following terms to find specific information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• medical conditions• stroke• dementia• fitness to drive• medical report.	<p>racv.com.au</p> <p>Search for 'dementia' to locate the RACV guide <i>Is driving with dementia possible?</i></p>
Assessing Fitness to Drive	Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) website
<p>Search for the <i>National Assessing Fitness to Drive</i> guidelines, which apply to all drivers across Australia.</p>	<p>tac.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Search for 'driving and pharmacy medications' for a list of some medications that can impair driving.</p>
The Vision Initiative	NPS Medicine Wise
<p>visioninitiative.org.au</p> <p>This site will provide you with general information regarding your eye health and having an eye check.</p>	<p>nps.org.au</p> <p>This site provides consumers and health professionals with information about the safe use of medicines. Search for the medicine type or health topic you want to know more about.</p>

Acknowledgement of Country

VicRoads acknowledges the traditional Aboriginal owners of country throughout Victoria and pays respect to them, their culture and their Elders, past, present and future.

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**For more information, visit www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
and search for 'older drivers'**