

# Driving and epilepsy



Epilepsy Action and NHS Tayside –  
working together to support  
people with epilepsy.

Epilepsy Action aims to improve the quality of life and promote the interests of people living with epilepsy.

## Our work...

- We provide information to anyone with an interest in epilepsy.
- We improve the understanding of epilepsy in schools and raise educational standards.
- We work to give people with epilepsy a fair chance of finding and keeping a job.
- We raise standards of care through contact with doctors, nurses, social workers, government and other organisations.
- We promote equality of access to quality care.

Epilepsy Action has local branches in most parts of the UK. Each branch offers support to local people and raises money to help ensure our work can continue.

## Join us...

You can help us in our vital work by becoming a member. All members receive our magazine *Epilepsy Today*, free cover under our unique personal accident insurance scheme and access to our services and conferences.

“Our vision is to live in a society where everyone understands epilepsy and where attitudes towards the condition are based on fact not fiction”

*Epilepsy Action, vision statement*

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## Introduction

This booklet gives information about driving for people with epilepsy in the UK. It covers the rules for holding a driving licence and explains how the agencies that issue driving licences work. It also tells you what help with transport costs is available, if you can't drive because of your epilepsy.

Information that applies only to Northern Ireland is shown in blue lettering. Information that applies only to Scotland is shown in purple lettering.



## The driving agencies

As well as licensing vehicles, the driving agencies decide if people are allowed to drive. They are also responsible for issuing driving licences to individuals.

Country	Agency	Shortened name
If you live in England, Scotland or Wales	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	DVLA
If you live in Northern Ireland	Driver and Vehicle Agency	DVA
Contact details are at the end of this booklet.		

The terms ‘driving agency’ and ‘driving agencies’ in this booklet are used where the information applies to both DVLA and DVA. Where something applies only to DVLA or only to DVA, we make that clear.

## Driving licence categories

Vehicle description	Driving licence category
Motorcycles and scooters	A+AI
Cars; vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes; vehicles with 1-8 passenger seats	B
Car plus trailer	B+E
Goods vehicles 3.5-7.5 tonnes	CI
Goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes	C
Vehicles with 9-16 passenger seats	DI
Vehicles with over 16 passenger seats	D
Tractors	F
Road rollers	G
Tracked vehicles	H
Electric vehicles	L
Mopeds	P
Sit-on lawn mowers; children's motor scooters	K
By law you don't need a driving licence to drive any vehicle on private land.	

Contact DVLA or DVA for further information about vehicle descriptions and driving licence categories.



## Driving licences and the epilepsy driving standards

Epilepsy driving standards for driving small vehicles

Epilepsy driving standards for driving lorries and buses

### Epilepsy driving standards for driving small vehicles

You can apply or reapply for a category A, B, B+E, F, G, H, K, L or P licence as long as:

- you have been free from seizures completely for one year\*, or
- you have experienced asleep seizures only, for a period of at least three years; and
- as far as you are able, you follow your doctor's advice about your treatment and check-ups for epilepsy; and
- the driving agency is satisfied that as a driver you are not likely to be a source of danger to the public.

\* The one year's seizure free period applies from the date of your most recent seizure.





## Epilepsy driving standards for driving lorries and buses

To drive lorries you need a category C1 or C entitlement. To drive buses you need a category D1 or D entitlement. See **Driving licence categories** on page 6. You can apply for these entitlement categories to be added to your licence as long as you:

- hold a full car licence; and
- have been free of seizures for ten years; and
- have not had to take anti-epileptic drugs during this ten year period; and
- if you are applying to DVA, have been declared fit to drive after a medical examination by a consultant nominated by your driving agency.

Licences are usually for one, two or three years. Three years is the most common. Once you have been seizure-free for a total of five years, and your doctor supports this fact, you can apply for a long term licence. In Northern Ireland you can apply for a 10 year licence. In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the rules change when you get to 70.



# Stopping driving

Stopping driving if you have epilepsy or a history of epilepsy

Stopping driving if you have a single seizure

Why you should stop driving

## Stopping driving if you have epilepsy or a history of epilepsy

### **Different types of seizures**

The driving law currently applies to any type of epileptic seizure, such as absence, partial, myoclonic and tonic-clonic seizures.

### **Awake and asleep seizures**

Some people have seizures when they are awake, some people have seizures when they are asleep and some people have both awake and asleep seizures. The driving laws for 'awake seizures' and 'asleep seizures' are different. If you have both awake and asleep seizures, the law for awake seizures applies.

### **Awake seizures**

If you have a suspected seizure at any time when you are awake, the law says you must stop driving and inform the driving agency.

### **Asleep seizures**

If you have a suspected seizure when you are asleep, the law says you should stop driving and inform the driving agency. The exception to this is if you already hold a driving licence that has been issued on the full understanding that you have asleep seizures only.

### **Break-through seizures**

If you hold a driving licence, and then have a break-through seizure, you should stop driving and inform the driving agency.

In exceptional circumstances, such as being given the wrong drugs, your doctor can seek advice from the Medical Adviser at the driving agency. Your doctor can then advise you what you need to do about your driving licence.

If the break-through seizure happens when you are asleep and your driving licence has been issued on the full understanding that you have asleep seizures only, you can carry on driving.

## Stopping driving if you have a single seizure

The law says that if you have a seizure you must stop driving and inform the driving agency.

### Single seizure with no specific cause

If you hold a category A, B, B+E, F, G, H, L or P licence you will need to stop driving for a minimum of six months from the date of the seizure. If you are also qualified to drive vehicles in categories C, C1, D, or D1 you will need to stop driving for a minimum of five years from the date of the seizure.

### Single seizure with a specific cause

Some seizures have a very specific cause that is unlikely to happen again. These seizures may be classed as 'provoked' by the driving agency. The following, however, are not classed as provoked by the driving agency:

- seizures associated with alcohol or illegal drug use
- seizures associated with lack of sleep
- seizures associated with a structural abnormality.

The following are not automatically considered as provoked by the driving agency:

- seizures reported as a side-effect of prescribed medication.



If you believe your seizure could be classed as provoked by the driving agency, you should first talk to your doctor. Your doctor can contact the Medical Adviser at the driving agency to find out more on your behalf. If the driving agency believes your seizure could be classed as provoked, they will look at your case individually. Based on a doctor's advice, the driving agency will advise you when you can start driving again.

### Why you should stop driving

- If you don't stop driving you may be breaking the law – and could face prosecution.
- Your current driving licence may not be valid.
- Your car insurance may not cover you.
- A seizure could affect your ability to drive safely.



## Informing the driving agencies

Informing the driving agencies that you have had a seizure

Informing the driving agencies if you are withdrawing or changing your anti-epileptic drugs

What you need to do after you have informed the driving agency that you have had a seizure

## Informing the driving agencies that you have had a seizure

### **Whose responsibility is it to inform the driving agency?**

It is your responsibility to inform the driving agency.

### **Why do I have to inform the driving agency?**

You have to inform the driving agency because if you don't you are breaking the law. Your current driving licence may not be valid. And you may find your insurance will not cover you if you make a claim.



### **Does anyone else have to inform the driving agency?**

Although it is your responsibility to inform the driving agency, if you don't do this and carry on driving, anyone could report this to them. Your doctor may also inform the driving agency if you carry on driving when you shouldn't. Although doctors have a duty to protect their patients' confidentiality, over and above this they have a duty of care to protect the public.

### **What do I need to do to inform the driving agency?**

You should write to, or telephone, the driving agency, telling them the date of your most recent seizure. You can enclose your driving licence with your letter. It's a good idea to either take a photocopy of your driving licence or to make a note of your driving licence number. This information will be helpful if you reapply for your licence at a later date.

## Informing the driving agencies if you are withdrawing or changing your anti-epileptic drugs

### Do I need to inform the driving agency if I'm withdrawing or changing my anti-epileptic drugs?

You may need to, depending where in the UK you live. See the table below.

Rules across the UK		
Country	Withdrawing your AEDs	Changing your AEDs
If you live in England, Scotland or Wales	DVLA recommends that for safety, you should stop driving during the period of drug withdrawal, and for six months after withdrawal is complete. You don't need to inform DVLA or return your licence.	Your doctor will advise you how long you may need to stop driving for. You don't need to inform DVLA or return your licence.
If you live in Northern Ireland	You must stop driving and inform DVA when your AEDs are withdrawn. Six months after withdrawal is complete, you should apply for a medical form to DVA. DVA will advise you if you can start driving again.	You must stop driving and inform DVA when your AEDs are changed. Six months after the change-over is complete, you should apply for a medical form to DVA. DVA will advise you if you can start driving again.



## What you need to do after you have informed the driving agency that you have had a seizure

### **If you sent your driving licence back voluntarily**

You don't have to do anything further at this stage. But remember, you can no longer legally drive.

### **If you didn't send your driving licence back voluntarily**

The driving agency will send you a form to complete and ask your permission to contact your doctor(s) for a medical report. In some cases they may ask for you to be examined by one of their nominated medical practitioners. The driving agency will then write and tell you whether or not your driving licence is formally withdrawn and, if so, for how long. This is known as 'revoking' your licence. They will also ask you to send your licence back.





## Applying and reapplying for your driving licence

Applying for your driving licence for the first time

Reapplying for your driving licence

What if the driving agency refuses my reapplication for a licence?

### Applying for your driving licence for the first time

Before you can start driving you will need a provisional driving licence. You can apply online at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) or complete an application form available from Post Offices. [In Northern Ireland you can get an application form from Post Offices, Local Vehicle Licensing Offices or MOT centres.](#)

To be allowed a provisional driving licence you will have to meet the epilepsy driving standards. See **Epilepsy driving standards** on page 7.



## Reapplying for your driving licence

Two months before the date you are due to get your licence back – but no sooner – you can write to the driving agency. You should state that you wish to reapply for your licence. [In Northern Ireland you will need to submit a DLI form \(Application for a Driving Licence\) to DVA. You can only do this two weeks before the date you are due to get your licence back.](#) You should give the date when you should be allowed to start driving again. Include your old driving licence number if you have it.

The driving agency will send you a form to complete, asking about your last seizure. They will ask your consent for a medical enquiry. They will also ask for the name of a doctor who can provide a medical report.



When you can start driving again depends on whether you sent back your last licence voluntarily, or whether it was formally withdrawn (revoked) by the driving agency.

There is no cost for reapplying for your licence, if you surrendered it because of your epilepsy.

### What if the driving agency refuses my reapplication for a licence?

You can write to the driving agency asking them to reconsider your case. You will need to explain why you believe their decision is wrong, and send with your letter, a letter of support from your GP or epilepsy specialist. If your request isn't successful, and you believe the driving agency is acting unlawfully, you can make a formal appeal. See **Appeals** on page 21.

# Reviews

When the driving agency may review their decision

A possible wrong diagnosis

A possible misunderstanding of your case

A possible administrative error

When the driving agency may not review their decision

Making a formal appeal

Sometimes the driving agency may make a decision that someone feels is unfair. In certain circumstances they may review their decision.

## When the driving agency may review their decision

You can ask the driving agency to review their decision if you think:

- you have a wrong diagnosis; or
- there is a misunderstanding of your case; or
- there has been an administrative error.

### A possible wrong diagnosis

If you think you have been wrongly diagnosed with epilepsy, you should first talk to your doctor. If necessary, ask to have another opinion from an epilepsy specialist. If your diagnosis changes, write to the driving agency, telling them you would like them to review their decision, and why. The driving agency will base their decision on whether you can have a driving licence on the information they get from you and your doctor.

### A possible misunderstanding of your case

If you think the driving agency has misunderstood your case you, or ideally your doctor, should write to the driving agency with further details. You can also send them copies of any new, relevant, medical information that comes to light. This information may show that your diagnosis has changed, or that your case is, in some way, exceptional.



### A possible administrative error

If you think the driving agency has made an administrative error, you should contact the driving agency, telling them what error you believe they have made. If this doesn't resolve the issue, you may then want to seek legal advice.

### When the driving agency may not review their decision

The driving agency may not review their decision if you don't meet the epilepsy driving standards. In this instance it is not legally possible for them to issue you with a driving licence. There are no exceptions to this, even if you feel you really need a driving licence. See **Epilepsy driving standards** on page 7 for more information.



## Appeals

### Making a formal appeal

If your request for a review of the driving agency's decision isn't successful, and you still believe their decision is unlawful, you may decide to make a formal appeal. The driving agency should send you details of the appeals process at the time of the licence decision.

Country	Who to appeal to	Time you have to appeal
If you live in England or Wales	Your local Magistrates' Court	Six months from the date of DVLA's decision
If you live in Scotland	Sheriff Court	21 days from the date of DVLA's decision
If you live in Northern Ireland	Your local Magistrates' Court	Three months from the date of issue of the decision letter





## Driving for a living

### Taxi driving

To drive a taxi you will need to have held a full driving licence for at least 12 months (three years in London) and hold a taxi operator's licence. You can apply for a taxi operator's licence to the licensing unit of your local authority. In London you should apply to the Public Carriage Office.

[In Northern Ireland, you should apply to DVA, Taxi Licensing Office, 148-158 Corporation Street, Belfast BT1 2DH.](#)

Each licensing unit has its own conditions of licence. Some impose the extra health requirements that are needed to hold a category C or D licence (see page 8). Contact your local licensing unit for the licensing requirements in your area.

### Driving forklift trucks or farm machinery

To drive a forklift truck or farm machinery on the public highway, you will need a full licence. The type of licence required will depend on the size of vehicle involved. You won't need a driving licence to drive these on private land. However, if your seizures are not well controlled it could put you or others at risk when you are driving. In this case, you could face some restrictions under the Health and Safety at Work Act.



## Motor insurance

You will need to inform your motor insurers about your epilepsy for your motor insurance to be valid. Contact Epilepsy Action for the latest information on 'epilepsy friendly' insurance companies.

## Help with transport if you can't drive because of your epilepsy

### Access to Work

Some people who can't drive because they have epilepsy may be entitled to help with the additional costs of travel to and from work, and also travelling while at work. This comes under the Access to Work scheme. Contact the Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus to see if you qualify for this. Contact details:

- Telephone: details in your phone book
- Website: [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

### Bus and rail services in England, Scotland and Wales

If you have epilepsy and still have seizures, even though you are taking anti-epileptic drugs, you are eligible for a Disabled Person's Railcard. You can get an application form from the following sources:

- Disabled persons railcard: [www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk)
- National Rail: tel 0845 748 4950
- The Epilepsy Helpline: tel 0808 800 5050; [helpline@epilepsy.org.uk](mailto:helpline@epilepsy.org.uk)

Many people with epilepsy are entitled to free bus fares. There are different rules about this in England, Scotland and Wales. Contact Epilepsy Action for more information.

### Bus and rail services in Northern Ireland

If you have been refused a driving licence because of your epilepsy, you may be entitled to a Half Fare SmartPass from Translink.

- Translink: tel 0845 600 0049; [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)



## Contact details for the driving agencies

### **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency**

Drivers Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea SA99 1TU

Tel: 0300 790 6806; Fax: 0845 850 0095

Email: [eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk)

### **Driver and Vehicle Agency in Northern Ireland**

Medical Section, Driving Licensing, County Hall, Castlerock Road,  
Coleraine, Co. Londonderry BT51 3TB

Tel: 0845 402 4000; Minicom: 028 7034 1380; Fax: 028 7034 1385

Email: [dvani@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:dvani@doeni.gov.uk)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring)

## About this booklet

This publication was written by Epilepsy Action's advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy and experts at DVLA and DVA.

### **Our thanks**

Epilepsy Action would like to thank staff at DVLA and DVA for their contribution to this booklet.

### **Disclosure**

The DVLA and DVA have no conflict of interest.

### **Disclaimer**

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information in its publications but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

### **Feedback**

If you have any comments about this booklet, we would love to hear from you. You can also contact us if you would like to know where we got our information from.

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**Booklet written:** March 2011

**Booklet review date:** March 2013

# First aid for tonic-clonic seizures

The person goes stiff, loses consciousness and falls to the floor

## Do...

- Protect the person from injury (remove harmful objects from nearby)
- Cushion their head
- Aid breathing by gently placing the person in the recovery position when the seizure has finished (see the pictures)
- Stay with them until recovery is complete
- Be calmly reassuring



## Don't...

- Restrain the person's movements
- Put anything in their mouth
- Try to move them unless they are in danger
- Give them anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered
- Attempt to bring them round

## Call 999 for an ambulance if...

- You know it is the person's first seizure
- The seizure continues for more than five minutes
- One seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness between seizures
- The person is injured
- You believe the person needs urgent medical attention

# First aid for focal seizures

The person is not aware of their surroundings or of what they are doing

## Some common symptoms

- Plucking at their clothes
- Smacking their lips
- Swallowing repeatedly
- Wandering around

## Do...

- Guide the person away from danger
- Stay with the person until recovery is complete
- Be calmly reassuring
- Explain anything that they may have missed

## Don't...

- Restrain the person
- Act in a way that could frighten them, such as making abrupt movements or shouting at them
- Assume the person is aware of what is happening, or what has happened
- Give the person anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered
- Attempt to bring them round

## Call 999 for an ambulance if...

- You know it is the person's first seizure
- The seizure continues for more than five minutes
- The person is injured during the seizure
- You believe the person needs urgent medical attention

## Further information

If you have any questions about epilepsy, please contact the Epilepsy Helpline.

Epilepsy Action has a wide range of publications about many different aspects of epilepsy. Information is available in the following formats: booklets, fact sheets, posters, books, videos and DVDs.

Information is also available in large text.

Please contact Epilepsy Action to request your free information catalogue.

## Epilepsy Action's support services

**Local meetings:** a number of local branches offer support across England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

**forum4e:** our online community is for people with epilepsy and carers of people with epilepsy. For people aged 16 years or over. Join at [www.forum4e.com](http://www.forum4e.com)

**Epilepsy awareness:** Epilepsy Action has a number of trained volunteers who deliver epilepsy awareness sessions to any organisation that would like to learn more about the condition. The volunteers are able to offer a comprehensive introduction to epilepsy to a range of audiences.

If you would like more information about any of these services, please contact Epilepsy Action. Contact details are at the back of this booklet.

## Driving and epilepsy

Please complete this form to tell us what you think of this publication.

How useful have you found this publication?

- Very useful     Useful     Quite useful     Not at all useful

Is the language clear and easy to understand?

- Very clear and easy to understand  
 Clear and easy to understand  
 Quite clear and easy to understand  
 Not at all clear or easy to understand

Does this publication cover all you want to know about the topic?

- Completely     Mostly     Not quite     Not at all

What do you think of the design and general layout of this publication?

- Excellent     Good     OK     Poor

Please let us have your comments:

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed form to:

Epilepsy Services, Epilepsy Action, FREEPOST LS0995, Leeds LS19 7YY



**epilepsy** *action*

**Epilepsy Action**  
**FREEPOST LS0995**  
**LEEDS**  
**LS19 7YY**

Registered charity in England (No. 234343)

## How to contact the Epilepsy Helpline

Telephone the Epilepsy Helpline freephone **0808 800 5050**

Monday to Thursday 9.00 am to 4.30 pm Friday 9.00 am to 4.00 pm

Our helpline staff are Typetalk trained

Write to us free of charge at **FREEPOST LS0995, Leeds, LS19 7YY**

Email us at **helpline@epilepsy.org.uk** or visit our website:

**www.epilepsy.org.uk**

Text your enquiry to **07797 805 390**

Send a Tweet to **@epilepsyadvice**

## About the Epilepsy Helpline

The helpline is able to offer advice and information in 150 languages.

We provide confidential advice and information to anyone living with epilepsy but we will not tell them what to do. We can give general medical information but cannot offer a medical diagnosis or suggest treatment. We can give general information on legal and welfare benefit issues specifically related to epilepsy. We cannot, however, take up people's cases on their behalf.

Our staff are trained advisers with an extensive knowledge of epilepsy related issues. Where we cannot help directly, we will do our best to provide contact details of another service or organisation better able to help with the query. In doing this, Epilepsy Action is not making a recommendation.

We welcome comments, both positive and negative, about our services.

To ensure the quality of our services we may monitor calls to the helpline.

**Epilepsy Helpline: freephone 0808 800 5050**

[www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk)



### **Epilepsy Action**

New Anstey House, Gate Way Drive, Yeadon, Leeds LS19 7XY

**tel.** 0113 210 8800 **email** [epilepsy@epilepsy.org.uk](mailto:epilepsy@epilepsy.org.uk)

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### **Environmental statement**

All Epilepsy Action booklets are printed on environmentally friendly, low-chlorine bleached paper. All paper used to make this booklet is from sustainable forests.

