

Driving and multiple sclerosis (MS)

After an MS diagnosis you're bound to worry about how the condition might impact your independence: 'Can I still drive?' is a common question. For most people with MS the answer is 'Yes', but there are some things you need to be aware of.

To drive safely you need good perception, judgement, responsiveness and reasonable physical capability. As the MS experience (and symptoms) differ for everyone, so too can the impact on driving vary from person to person.

Early identification and knowing what to do is key. With the right information and support, driving issues can be managed effectively and often, adaptive vehicle or other modifications made, to enable you to maintain an independent lifestyle.

Which MS symptoms could affect my driving?

As your MS experience is unique to you, it's tricky to come up with a definitive list. The symptoms which might impact your driving include numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, visual and cognitive problems, fatigue, spasms and weakness, which may affect or present as some of the following:

- **Leg coordination** – for brake, accelerator and clutch use
- **Simultaneous coordination of arms and legs** – to change gears
- **Strength and muscle power** – for using foot pedals and steering wheel
- **Controlled speed of movement** – for vehicle control
- **Vision** – peripheral vision, judging distance, seeing poorly lit objects and coping with glare
- **Fatigue levels** – maintaining alertness, concentration, reaction time, judgment and planning
- **Heat sensitivity** – driving on a hot day, especially in a car without air conditioning
- **Memory** – knowledge of road rules, signs and destination routes
- **Sensation** – for feeling the pedals
- **Muscle control** – for being fully in control of driving
- **Cognitive issues** – poor attention, reduced concentration etc.

It's important to remember that most people with MS are confident and safe drivers. Vehicle features like automatic transmission, power steering and height-adjustable seats can make a difference. Simple adjustments to your normal routine can also help, for example not driving at night.

Whilst MS symptoms might affect your driving, there are things you can do. Talk with your healthcare team, for general advice and referrals to the appropriate authorities or organisations in your area.

The law and your legal responsibility

All Australian states and territories have laws about reporting health conditions that might affect your ability to drive safely.

These laws require you to report, to your driver licensing authority, any permanent or long-term illness that is likely to affect your ability to drive safely. This must be done at the time the condition occurs, not just when renewing your licence.

In Australia, the state or territory driver licensing authority issues, renews, suspends or cancels driver, conditional, learner permit and commercial licences. Their licensing decisions are based on

factors including driver health, driving record, licence classification, type of vehicle and involve input from the driver and if required, a GP or other health professional.

Do I need to tell the licensing authority about my MS?

Yes – and this is a big YES. You must tell your state or territory licensing authority that you have been diagnosed with MS, and you must also inform them if your MS gets worse. You can be fined if you don't tell them about a medical condition that may affect your driving. And you may be prosecuted if you're involved in an accident as a result (and may not be covered by your insurance), so it's not worth the risk. If you need vehicle control adaptations, the law may require that this is specified on your licence too.

The rules and systems vary across the country, so check with your state/territory driver licensing authority. You may be required to undergo an assessment that may involve a **medical review** initiated by your doctor, another health professional or the licensing authority.

It's best to get the right advice from the right people early on. If any MS symptoms impact your driving ability, discuss appropriate actions with a member of your healthcare team without delay.

The results of a **medical review** may include:

- **Retain your unconditional licence** – no further action required.
- **Provision of conditional licence** – you can continue driving as long as certain conditions are met (e.g. driving during daylight hours or whilst wearing glasses or corrective lenses, or special vehicle modifications put in place, such as foot or hand controls).
- **Suspension or withdrawal of licence** – if MS impairs a person's ability to drive safely.

You may also undergo a **practical driver** assessment to measure the impact of MS on your driving skills including judgement, decision-making, observation and vehicle handling.

These assessments are conducted by occupational therapists or other approved personnel and include off-road, on-road and driving simulator assessments. Recommendations may relate to your licence status, need for modifications (e.g. left leg accelerator or hand controls), rehabilitation or retraining, licence conditions and reassessment.

Commercial vehicle drivers

If you are a commercial vehicle driver with MS, you should also seek guidance from your state/territory driver licensing authority.

Insurance companies

You need to tell your insurance company about your MS and if your vehicle has any adaptations.

Anyone who takes out or renews a vehicle insurance policy has a 'duty of disclosure' – which means to answer questions to the best of your knowledge (at the time), and disclose anything you think may be relevant to the risk of new or renewed insurance.

Insurance companies may ask for proof of medical conditions e.g. vision issues, which may affect your ability to drive.

What else can I do?

All drivers should regularly self-assess their driving ability to ensure their own, and other road users' safety. You may need some practical lessons to adjust your driving skills, bearing any symptoms in mind. And if you feel you would benefit from a refresh of road rule knowledge, some state/territory MS organisations offer online practice tests.

Talk to your MS healthcare team if you need other forms of transport such as taxi vouchers, public transport or other mobility options.

Your car

Your car (or other vehicle) specifications may help prolong your driving, for example it may be useful to consider the following features:

- Automatic transmission
- Door width (a two/three door car has wider doors)
- Easy-to-reach doors
- Vehicle seats e.g. height and shape
- Steering wheel – power steering, comfortable grip
- Readily accessible lights, indicators, wipers and horn

MS Photo ID Card

Some state and territory MS organisations also offer registered clients with (a confirmed diagnosis of) MS, a free MS Photo ID Card. This card can be useful for telling others that you have multiple sclerosis and that you may, for example, have vision, balance or coordination issues.

Information and assistance:

General

There is support available to help you manage your MS:

- **Your GP** should be the first contact for any new and/or persistent symptom concerns related to driving and MS.
- **Your neurologist, MS Nurse or other healthcare provider** can help you to manage symptoms on an ongoing basis and discuss the best approach for your individual circumstances.
- **Contact your state MS organisations** (details below) to access services including peer support and other resources.
- For information about MS and MS treatments visit www.msaustralia.org.au
- **Contact details for your state/territory MS organisations:**

MS Connect (Victoria, NSW, ACT and Tasmania)	1800 042 138	msconnect@ms.org.au	www.ms.org.au
MSWA (Western Australia)	1800 287 367	enquiries@mswa.org.au	www.mswa.org.au
MS Assist (South Australia and NT)	1800 812 311	msassist@ms.asn.au	www.ms.asn.au
MS Queensland	1800 287 367	mssociety@msqld.org.au	www.msqld.org.au

State/Territory Driver Licensing Authorities

- **ACT 13 22 81** www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/forms/RTA_feedback
- **NSW 13 22 13** <https://secure.rms.nsw.gov.au/contact-us/>
- **NT 08 8999 1800** <https://nt.gov.au/driving>
- **QLD 13 QGOV (13 74 68)** www.qld.gov.au/transport/licensing/index.html
- **SA 13 10 84** www.sa.gov.au/topics/driving-and-transport
- **TAS 1300 135 513** www.transport.tas.gov.au/licensing/information
- **VIC 13 11 71** www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences
- **WA 13 11 56** www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/renew-my-wa-drivers-licence.asp

National Agencies and Guides (including MS-specific information)

- **Australian Government** registration and licence information www.australia.gov.au/information-and-services/transport-and-regional/registration-and-licences
- **Austroads 02 8265 3300** www.austroads.com.au is the peak organisation of Australasian road transport and traffic agencies. Austroads supports its member organisations to deliver an improved (and safer) road transport network.
- The **[Assessing Fitness to Drive Guidelines 2016](#)** includes medical standards to provide guidance to health professionals and driver licensing authorities about health assessment for private and commercial drivers, **including for people living with MS** – see pages 10, 71, 76, 98, 99 & 102 and pages 147 & 148 for **state/territory legislation regarding reporting by drivers (as at Dec 2015)**
<http://www.austroads.com.au/drivers-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive>
 - **For Private Vehicle Drivers** www.austroads.com.au/drivers-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive/for-private-vehicle-drivers
 - **Licensing Authority Contacts** www.austroads.com.au/drivers-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive/contacts

Other

- **Carers Australia 1800 242 636** www.carersaustralia.com.au provides information and advice to carers, their friends and families about carer support and services.
- **Independent Living Centres Australia 1300 885 886** www.ilcaustralia.org.au provides information about products and services to help people remain independent and improve their quality of life, including Modified Vehicles and Driving Controls.
- **The National Public Toilet map** www.toiletmap.gov.au details over 16,000 toilet facility locations and has a trip planner with the facility to plan toilet breaks for short and long vehicle journeys. You can access the map via compatible mobile phones and the National Public Toilet Map iPhone App.

Sources

This fact sheet comprises material from previously published Australian MS State/Territory Organisation leaflets plus Multiple Sclerosis (MS) UK Trust and Austroads online resources (and associated references), and has been approved by both a medical expert and a person living with MS.

Disclaimer: Information prepared by MS Australia. It is intended to provide useful and accurate information of a general nature and is not a substitute for medical advice.