

Functional Conditions

Driving-Related Fact Sheet

For Medical Professionals



July 2023

Functional Impairment

Effects on Driving

Sensory

- Tingling, numbness, and loss of position in the upper or lower extremities that affects the ability to feel, grasp, manipulate or release objects

- Momentary loss of control of the vehicle
- Improper or delayed signal to other drivers that the vehicle is turning, changing lanes, slowing, or stopping
- Misapplication of the pedals or confusing the brake with the accelerator
- Difficulty stopping the vehicle or steering
- Inability to control the vehicle's lane position and turning motion

Strength

- Inability to maintain a firm grip on objects
- Inability to apply consistent pressure to objects with legs and feet
- Weakness or paralysis of muscles affecting the ability to maintain balance while sitting
- Weakness or paralysis in extremities affecting the ability to feel, grasp, manipulate, or release objects

- Inability to safely control the vehicle's lane position and turning motion
- Improper or delayed signal to other drivers that the vehicle is turning, changing lanes, or stopping
- Inability to adjust high-beam headlights when necessary
- Difficulty or inability to maintain consistent speed or stop the vehicle
- Loss of vehicle control due to driver falling to one side during turns or other sudden motions

Flexibility

- Rigidity or limited range of mobility in neck, torso, arms, legs, or joints

- Difficulty controlling, turning, or stopping a vehicle
- Failure to use, or delay in use of, appropriate signals for turning, changing lanes, or stopping
- Difficulty maintaining lane position and consistent speed
- Difficulty turning the head to check blind spot prior to a lane change, or to observe vehicles or pedestrians entering the roadway or when merging

Motor Planning and Coordination

- Difficulty and slowness in initiating movement
- Vertigo, dizziness, loss of balance, or other motor planning conditions
- Involuntary muscle movements
- Loss of muscle control
- Tremor

- Difficulty controlling, turning, or stopping a vehicle; failure to use, or delay in use of, appropriate signals for turning, changing lanes, or stopping
- Difficulty maintaining lane position, consistent speed, or safe control for long distances
- Delay in responding to the position of other vehicles that are changing lanes, are in the oncoming lane of traffic, or are entering the roadway
- Delay in responding to changing traffic control devices or conditions





The Clinician's Role

- While any condition that affects the upper or lower limbs, the neck, or the back can have an effect on safe driving, it is possible to modify and adapt a vehicle to accommodate a physical limitation. The clinician should assess the extent of the physical and psychomotor limitations and determine whether further functional evaluation is indicated. If there are any doubts about the capacity of the driver to perform tasks in an unmodified vehicle, make a referral to a driving professional for assessment and rehabilitation.
- With impairments such as those described above, there are no generalized rules such as “If you have X condition, you may not drive for 3 weeks.” Each case must be assessed, taking into consideration the characteristics of the person involved.

For more information go to www.medscape.com

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U.S. Department of Transportation
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Administration**

