

Physical Limitations

Driving-Related Fact Sheet

For Medical Professionals



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Pain and the decrease of motor strength or physical functioning associated with any physical limitation can affect driver safety. Common conditions in this category include:

- Arthritis;
- Amputation;
- Stroke;
- Multiple Sclerosis;
- Parkinson's Disease; and
- Spinal Cord Injury.

Effects on Driving

- Any condition that affects the upper or lower limbs, the neck, or back can alter the ability to drive. People suffering from these conditions, along with those who have lost (or lost the use of) one or more extremities should contact a driver rehabilitation specialist. These specialists can prescribe vehicle adaptive devices or adaptations to limb prostheses, and train the patient in their use. For any adaptive device, driving should be restricted until the driver demonstrates safe driving ability.
- The use of prosthetic limbs on vehicle foot pedals, however, is unsafe because there is no sensory feedback (i.e., pressure and proprioception). For these drivers, specialized hand controls in place of pedals are required.
- A driver rehabilitation specialist can also help a driver experiencing immobilization of wrist, hand, or fingers, which makes it difficult to manipulate the controls and the steering wheel. Adaptive devices can alleviate these issues.
- For temporary conditions where the driver has a limb in a cast or other immobilizing device, it can take time to reach a level of functioning needed for safe driving.

The Clinician's Role

- Refer patients who have lost the use of a limb to a driver rehabilitation specialist. Without an evaluation, the driver might choose to continue driving a vehicle without modifications, creating a potentially dangerous situation.
- Advise drivers with a temporary acute injury (fractures, dislocations) or a post-surgical situation, to refrain from driving as long as the immobilization is in place or until there is full mobility.
- Assess the extent of the physical and psychomotor limitations and determine the need for further functional evaluation. Refer the person to an occupational therapist or driving specialist if there are any doubts about the capacity of the driver to perform the tasks required for driving safely.

For more information go to www.medscape.com

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