

Narcolepsy Need-to-Know Guide

Driving

Many people with narcolepsy are able to drive. However, narcolepsy is a condition that may affect your ability to drive safely, and you will be permitted to drive only if DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency - the organisation that licenses cars and drivers for driving on public roads in the UK) is satisfied that your condition is controlled well enough that allowing you to drive will not cause an unacceptable risk to you and to other people.

Consequently, if you drive and are diagnosed with narcolepsy, or if you are applying for your first driving licence, it is essential that you inform the DVLA of your condition, so that they can make the necessary investigations and can reach an informed decision on whether to permit you to drive.

The information in this guide relates primarily to standard (Group 1) licences applicable to cars, motorcycles and mopeds. Group 2 licences apply to larger vehicles, but because of the greater risks involved it would be unusual for a person with narcolepsy to be issued with a Group 2 licence. If you hold such a licence and are diagnosed with narcolepsy it is even more essential that you notify DVLA immediately.

Applying for your first driving licence

If you want to learn to drive and have narcolepsy, you will need to fill in a standard "D1" application form but you must also inform DVLA that you have narcolepsy. They will send you a medical questionnaire for more information about your narcolepsy.

The DVLA will decide whether you can have a driving licence based on the information you provide in the forms and they may contact your doctor for more information if they need it.

Although you may have to wait to start lessons, you can take the theory test while you wait; your result will remain valid for two years.

What to do if you drive and are diagnosed with narcolepsy

If you hold a driving licence and are diagnosed with narcolepsy, then unless your doctor advises that your condition is controlled well enough that you meet the medical standards for driving, you must cease driving immediately.

Notifying the DVLA

You must inform DVLA of your diagnosis. This can be done by completing Form SL1 (downloadable [here](#)) or by email, letter, fax or phone:

Drivers Medical Group
DVLA
Swansea
SA99 1TU
Phone: 03300 790 6806
Email: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk
Fax: 0845 800095

If your doctor advises you that you should stop driving, you must surrender your licence to DVLA.

Voluntarily surrendering your licence, as opposed to having DVLA revoke it, means that you may be able to benefit from the provision of Section 88 of the Road Traffic Act. The significant point here is that as and when your narcolepsy is sufficiently well controlled that your doctor feels you can safely drive, you can legally drive again as soon as you have submitted an application to DVLA to have your licence re-issued. In other words, you can drive while your application is being processed, rather than having to wait until DVLA reaches a decision on your application. Needless to say, you should only do this if you and your doctor are confident that your narcolepsy is so well controlled that your licence will indeed be re-issued. You should discuss the matter in depth with your doctor, and if there is any doubt about your whether your licence will be re-issued, it would be better not to drive until DVLA has reached a decision. You should also be aware, for instance, that although you may be able to drive in the UK while your application is being processed, other countries may have different rules and so you may not be entitled to drive there.

Please note that you must notify DVLA of your diagnosis, even if your doctor feels it is safe for you to continue driving.

What happens next

Once you have notified DVLA of your condition, they make investigations that enable them to decide whether you may continue to drive. This might involve contacting your doctor or consultant, arranging for you to be examined and/or asking you to take a driving assessment.

DVLA aims to make a decision on your case within 6 weeks. They should inform you by letter if the process is taking longer than that.

Once DVLA has completed its assessment, they will tell you the outcome. This may be:

- you can keep your licence (or get a new one);
- you can have a licence for a short, fixed period – 1, 2 or 3 years – with a review at the end of that period; or
- you must stop driving and give up your licence.

If you are given a 1-, 2- or 3-year licence, it will be reviewed again when you re-apply. Re-licensing may be possible provided that your GP satisfies DVLA that your condition is adequately controlled.

Do I have to inform DVLA of my narcolepsy?

The short answer is: Yes, it is the legal duty of a licence holder or licence applicant to notify DVLA of any medical condition that may affect safe driving.

If your doctor feels that your condition does potentially place you or others at risk if you continue to drive, he will explain this to you and remind you of your duty to notify DVLA. If you do not accept the diagnosis or your doctor's advice not to drive, he will suggest that you seek a second opinion and advise you not to drive in the meantime.

If you continue to drive against your doctor's advice, and he is unable to persuade you to stop, you must remember that your doctor will be aware of guidance from the General Medical Council (GMC) which indicates that he has a responsibility to notify DVLA himself, though he will first inform you that he is going to do so .

Telling your insurance company

It will generally be a condition of your motor insurance that you must notify the insurance company in the event that you have to stop driving due to any medical condition. Therefore, if you have to stop driving as a result of a diagnosis of narcolepsy, you should inform your insurance company promptly. Please note that failure to notify your insurance company of your diagnosis could invalidate your insurance and place you at considerable financial risk if you are involved in an accident.

Once DVLA confirms you can have a driving licence, you are able to drive any vehicle that your licence covers. Under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), insurance companies should not increase the cost of your policy just because you have a history of narcolepsy.

If the licence that is issued to you is a short term (1-, 2- or 3-year licence), insurance companies cannot use that fact as a reason for increasing your premium, or for changing or refusing a policy.

Insurance companies can ask questions or ask for more information about medical conditions to support your application. They may ask to see your driving licence or a letter from the DVLA confirming that you are allowed to drive. This should mean that each application is considered fairly. If the company increases your premium, they must be able to give you a valid reason for doing so.

For more information on the DDA, contact the [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#). If you have any problems with insurance, the [Financial Ombudsman](#) may be able to help.

What if DVLA refuses to give me a licence?

If you do not hold a valid driving licence, you must not drive.

If your driving licence is revoked or refused by the Drivers' Medical section at DVLA you will be provided with a medical explanation of why this decision was taken (wherever possible DVLA will advise you when you can re-apply for your licence).

It is a good idea to talk to your doctor about any further medical evidence they could give DVLA to consider.

You can appeal against a decision by DVLA. In England and Wales this needs to be done at a Magistrates' Court within 6 months of the DVLA telling you their decision, and in Scotland within 21 days at a Sheriff's Court. You are not allowed to drive while your appeal is being heard.

If you intend to appeal, you must inform DVLA in writing that you are going to do so.

Driving abroad

The rules for driving with narcolepsy vary from country to country. If you have a UK driving licence, the DVLA regulations apply to you only while you drive in the UK, and do not apply outside of the UK. When driving abroad, you will still need your UK driving licence but you can only drive if you meet the medical standards for the country that you are visiting. Check with your insurers that you are covered for overseas driving and contact the Embassy of the country you are visiting for further information.

Driving and medication

It is not only illegal drugs that can impair your ability to drive. Prescription medicines and over-the-counter treatments may also have that effect. This is especially true of treatments for narcolepsy, many of which have a strong stimulant or sedative effect and may be controlled drugs that are susceptible to abuse.

Although you will not be permitted to drive unless your doctor and DVLA are satisfied that your condition is effectively controlled by the medication you are prescribed, sometimes your medication may not have its usual effect. If you yourself do not feel that your narcolepsy is under control, then (as for any other person who feels drowsy) for the sake of your safety and that of others you should not drive. Similarly, you should drive only if you have taken your prescribed medication in the way that has been prescribed, and not if you have forgotten to take a dose or have been unable to do so for some other reason, or indeed if you have accidentally taken too much medication.

On 2 March 2015 a new law on driving while under the influence of certain drugs came into force. People with narcolepsy who drive may be concerned about the possible impact of the new law.

The first point to note is that the new law does not replace any existing laws. It was, and still is, an offence to drive while impaired by a drug of any kind, irrespective of whether the drug is a medication or an illegal drug.

The drawback of the existing law was (from the point of view of the police) that a conviction could only be obtained if it could be shown that the driver was "impaired", and that was often difficult to prove, with the result that time and money was wasted on prosecutions that failed.

The new law introduces legal limits for a list of sixteen specific drugs, including eight illegal drugs and eight prescription medicines. Driving while under the influence of these drugs is now treated in the same way as driving under the influence of alcohol: there is a specified

limit and driving while over that limit is an offence. There is no need for the police to show that there has been "impairment"; all that matters is that the blood level exceeds the limit.

For the named prescription medicines, however, the new law does provide a defence: if the medicines are being taken in accordance with a prescription, and driving was not "impaired", there will be no offence. It is also important to note that the limits for these drugs have been set considerably higher than the levels that occur through normal proper medical use.

The prescription drugs that are currently covered by the new law are not normally used for the treatment of narcolepsy. They include temazepam and other so-called benzodiazepine drugs that are normally used to treat insomnia and anxiety. The complete list is:

- temazepam
- clonazepam
- diazepam
- flunitrazepam
- lorazepam
- methadone
- morphine
- oxazepam
- amphetamine

The inclusion of amphetamine in this list affects those people with narcolepsy who take dexamphetamine. If you are in any doubt as to whether any medication you are prescribed is covered by the new law, you should ask your doctor.

All this means that general advice to people with narcolepsy whose symptoms are well enough controlled by medication for them to be able to drive remains as follows:

- Your medication should always be taken strictly in accordance with the instructions given to you by your medical practitioner.
- Failure to take your medication, or indeed taking too much, could impair your driving. If that happens, you should not drive.
- If your ability to drive is "impaired", whether due to your medication, fatigue or for any other reason, you should not drive. This applies to all drivers, of course, not just to people with narcolepsy.
- As a precaution, keep in your car a copy of documents confirming that your symptoms are well enough controlled by your medication that you are permitted to drive. That may be, for instance, a copy of a letter from DVLA or from your GP, together with a copy of your prescription.

Driving and narcolepsy – Useful contacts

To contact DVLA:

Drivers Medical Enquiries
DVLA
Swansea
SA99 1TU

Contact form:

<https://emaildvla.direct.gov.uk/emaildvla/cegemail/dvla/en/index.html>



Tel: 0300 790 6806

Fax: 0845 850 0095

Telephone lines open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 5:30pm, Saturday, 8am to 1pm

In relation to any issue of discrimination:

Equality Advisory and Support Service

FREEPOST Equality Advisory Support Service FPN4431

Tel: 0808 800 0082

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Opening hours: 09:00 to 20:00 Monday to Friday

10:00 to 14:00 Saturday

Closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays

For financial issues, eg unfair insurance premiums:

The Financial Ombudsman Service

Exchange Tower

London E14 9SR

Consumer Helpline (open Monday to Friday – 8am to 8pm, Saturday – 9am to 1pm)

0800 023 4 567: normally free for people ringing from a "fixed line" phone – but charges may apply from a mobile phone

0300 123 9 123: charged at the same rate as 01 or 02 numbers on mobile phone tariffs

Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk

For help and guidance:

Narcolepsy UK helpline

Tel: 0345 450 0394

Email: info@narcolepsy.org.uk

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IMPORTANT NOTE: Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this Guide is accurate, it is for general guidance only. Specific advice on your individual circumstances should always be sought. Narcolepsy UK cannot accept any responsibility or liability for actions taken in reliance on the information contained in this Guide.