Occupational therapy driver assessment

VicRoads is responsible for ensuring that all drivers and applicants for a licence have appropriate and safe driving skills.

VicRoads may at any time ask you to have an occupational therapy driver assessment to show that you can drive safely. Even if you are an experienced driver, you may be asked to have this assessment.

You, VicRoads, your family, your doctor or anyone involved in your care may arrange an assessment.

An assessment may be necessary because:

- you have a medical condition(s) or disability and would like to know if you are able to obtain or retain a driver licence
- a physical injury, head injury, illness, disability, stroke or psychiatric condition may have affected your ability to drive safely
- your physical skills or thinking abilities may have changed since you first obtained your licence.

Your obligations

You are required by law to notify VicRoads if you have any serious or chronic medical condition or disability that may affect your fitness to drive. Failure to notify could also affect your insurance cover.

Sometimes impairments associated with medical conditions and disabilities can influence how well you drive. Some medicines may also affect your ability to drive safely. It is illegal to drive if you are affected by medicine(s). Discuss this with your doctor. Unsafe drivers are a concern for pedestrians and other drivers.

Assessment benefits

In the past, many patients discharged from hospital resumed driving before it was safe to do so. Often they did not receive advice about retraining or vehicle modifications to their car which would maximise their driving safety.
In some cases if there was a concern about deterioration of driving skills, their doctor had no choice but to tell them to stop driving.

Your assessment will help show you how to improve your skills to be able to drive safely. Your assessment can also identify aids, techniques and modifications which might improve your comfort and safety when driving.

The role of occupational therapists

Occupational therapists are health professionals who assist people with physical or mental disabilities to resume normal daily activities. Some occupational therapists have additional qualifications, which allow them to help their clients either obtain a driver licence or maintain their ability to drive safely.

Victorian law allows a qualified occupational therapist to conduct a driver assessment. Occupational therapists, like doctors or optometrists, are independent specialists working in the field of health care. They do not work for, and are not paid by VicRoads.

What does the assessment involve?

1. A medical assessment

You will be asked to provide a current medical report from your own doctor or specialist which shows that you meet the national medical standards for licensing. If you have eyesight problems, you may also have to provide an eyesight report. Being medically fit does not exempt you from undergoing a driver assessment, as your doctor cannot assess your practical driving skills.

VicRoads determines your fitness to drive on a case by case basis in accordance with national medical standards. Medical advice and assessment outcomes are also considered.

Standards for commercial truck, taxi and bus licences are stricter than those for private licences.

The occupational therapy driver assessment is in two parts: an off-road assessment and an on-road test.
2. Off-road assessment
The occupational therapist will ask you about your driving and medical history, test your understanding of road law, and assess your physical, visual, sensory and thinking abilities. This may take up to two hours.

This assessment evaluates your functional limitations, your understanding of safe driving, the need for vehicle modifications or licence conditions, and determines the requirements for your on-road test, e.g:
- the type of vehicle (e.g. automatic or manual)
- any vehicle modifications
- where the test should be conducted.

3. On-road test
The test will occur in a dual controlled car with a driving instructor and the occupational therapist. The instructor maintains the safety of the vehicle. It will take about an hour and a half (of which up to one hour will involve driving).

The following will be observed:
- Physical limitations
- Judgement and ability to adjust to traffic situations
- Reacting appropriately to traffic
- Abiding with road laws

If vehicle modifications are required (e.g. steering aid, left foot accelerator), the equipment is fitted and trialled to ensure you can safely use it.

Why is the assessment required?
An assessment may be required if a driver has a serious or chronic medical condition or disability which may affect fitness to drive.

Some people may have an assessment because they are subject to ongoing reviews to monitor a deteriorating medical condition. Other people who have failed an on-road test for an unconditional licence may be eligible to be retested for a conditional licence with a local area restriction.
Your assessment outcomes

If your assessment is satisfactory you may be able to resume driving

- unconditionally (retain full privileges) or
- with modifications to your car, and/or
- with some restrictions to your driving.

VicRoads will make the final decision regarding your licence status.

If you are found unsafe to drive:

- you may be asked to take some lessons to improve your driving skills or to familiarise yourself with adaptive driving equipment. You may have to have a further on-road test after you have completed these lessons.
- you may be asked to wait for further recovery or improvement to occur
- you may be found not safe to continue or to resume driving.

How do I arrange an assessment?

You, your family, your doctor or anyone involved in your care may arrange an assessment by contacting a qualified occupational therapist who will organise to conduct your assessment. You will need a current medical report.

Can I choose my occupational therapist?

Yes. You can contact your local hospital, medical centre or community health centre. Or you can call VicRoads Medical Review on 9854 2407 for a list of occupational therapy driver assessors in your area.

How much will it cost?

Costs for the off-road and on-road components may vary depending on factors such as how long the assessment takes and costs associated with driving instructors and dual controlled cars. You should discuss this with your chosen occupational therapist before arranging for the assessment to take place.
In some cases, assessments may be partly or fully paid by an insurance scheme (e.g. TAC, WorkCover) or through rehabilitation services. The cost of the assessment is not covered by Medicare or VicRoads.

Can I have the test in my own car?
No. A special car with controls on both the driver’s and passenger’s side is used to ensure safety for the driver and other road users.

Can I have a driving test at VicRoads?
No. VicRoads test for experienced drivers is designed for drivers who do not have medical conditions that may affect safe driving. The VicRoads test does not assess how a medical condition or the deterioration of driving skills affects the ability to drive safely.

What if I hold a heavy vehicle licence?
Passing an assessment in a car does not mean that you are automatically allowed to drive a heavy vehicle. This is because the standard required for heavy vehicles is more stringent. VicRoads will let you know if a separate heavy vehicle assessment is required.

What to bring to your assessment
- Your medical report form (if not already provided to the occupational therapist or to VicRoads).
- Your driver licence or learner permit (if you hold one).
- Your corrective lenses and/or hearing aids if you wear them for reading or driving.
- Any cushions, back supports or other equipment you need to use to drive.
- A list of all the medicines you take.
- The consent/release of information form (if provided to you by the occupational therapist).
- Payment for the assessment (if necessary and as arranged by the occupational therapist).
Conditional licences

If you can show that you can drive safely, but only under certain conditions, a conditional licence may be considered. A wide range of conditions are possible. Driving conditions are aimed at maximising your safety and that of other road users. They include wearing corrective lenses, driving automatic vehicles or a specially modified vehicle, driving in daylight hours only or in certain areas.

Your assessor will normally discuss these options with you at the time of your off-road assessment. If you have any specific driving needs you should mention them to the assessor before your assessment commences. Once you are issued with a conditional licence changing these conditions will require reassessment.

What if my licence is varied, suspended or cancelled?

If VicRoads suspends or cancels your licence, or refuses to issue you with a licence because your driving is found to be unsafe, you will need to have another occupational therapy driver assessment. The occupational therapist will make a recommendation to VicRoads, who will make a decision regarding licensing. You may also need to provide another medical report.

If you disagree with the test outcome you may request an independent assessment by another qualified occupational therapist.

If VicRoads varies, suspends or cancels your licence you can appeal against the decision. However, you cannot appeal if VicRoads requests you to provide a medical or other report, or asks you to undertake a driving test.

There are two ways you can appeal:

1. You can write to VicRoads and ask for an internal review.
2. You can appeal to the Magistrates’ Court.

The VicRoads notice of suspension or cancellation will provide you with advice on your legal rights.
Additional resources

A range of publications is available including:

- The Victorian Older Drivers’ Handbook
- VicRoads Medical Review: assessing your fitness to drive
- Brochures on specific medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, glaucoma)

For further information or to obtain medical or eyesight report forms contact:

VicRoads Medical Review
PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101
Tel (03) 9854 2407
Fax (03) 9854 2307
Email medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au
Web vicroads.vic.gov.au
vicroads.vic.gov.au/olderdrivers
vicroads.vic.gov.au/familyandfriends

Forms can be downloaded from VicRoads website.

Most publications are free and can be ordered from Victorian Government Bookshop on 1300 366 356 or via their website: bookshop.vic.gov.au

The information in this booklet has been prepared in consultation with:

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