

Fact Sheet 11

Epilepsy and Driving

Driving requires a complex array of neurological functions and skills that involve vision, thinking, attention and judgement, co-ordination, reaction time and motor control. Any of these can be impaired by epilepsy and seizures. People who drive vehicles may present safety concerns for themselves, their passengers and the public.

Despite having epilepsy, many people are still able to drive and hold a driver's licence, but conditions do apply. It is necessary to be assessed and advised by your neurologist to determine your eligibility to hold a driver's licence. If break-through seizures occur, it is important for your safety, and that of other road users, to stop driving immediately. It may mean that there is a seizure-free period of a year before you are potentially able to hold a driver's licence again. In some cases the stand-down period could be six months, but this is at the discretion of the New Zealand Transport Authority in consultation with your neurologist.

To drive a vehicle whilst experiencing uncontrolled seizures means that:

- (a) your seizures could be affecting your ability to drive;
- (b) you are breaking the law;
- (c) your car insurance may not cover you.

For more information on epilepsy and seizures in New Zealand, please go to the website below:

<https://www.nzta.govt.nz/driver-licences/getting-a-licence/medical-requirements/epilepsyseizures-and-driving/>

Topics covered are:

- Am I legally allowed to drive?
- Guidelines for private drivers
- Controlled epilepsy
- Uncontrolled epilepsy
- Driving for work
- P,V, I or O endorsements and heavy vehicle licence classes
- Precautions while driving

When you have been suspended from driving by a neurologist or GP because of a seizure, they will write a letter to the NZTA letting them know of that fact. This information is then relayed to the police who will keep it on record. You may be asked to hand in your driver's licence to the AA for the period of your suspension and you will possibly face criminal charges if you are caught driving a vehicle during this time. It would also be against the law if you drove a mobility scooter if your neurologist or GP deemed you unfit to drive.

If you are caught driving whilst being disqualified or suspended, the vehicle that you are driving will be seized and impounded for 28 days.

Most people with epilepsy take medications to control seizures and that is perfectly legal. However, it is illegal to drive if your medications have caused your body or emotions to be affected in a way that makes you an unsafe driver. Some medications can affect your cognitive ability, your reaction times and perception of reality. It may even make you feel more tired. If you are impaired by your anti-seizure medications then you risk causing death or serious injury to yourself and other people.

Please consult your medical professional about your medication side effects that are causing issues with your driving. It may only be a temporary problem.

In New Zealand a person with a disability is not generally entitled to subsidised public transport costs, but a taxi voucher scheme does operate in some areas.

To inquire as to whether or not you qualify for subsidised taxi cover in Hamilton, you can contact Maria on maria@ewct.org.nz or 021 888 293.

In Hamilton people with epilepsy are able to be assessed for an Accessibility Concession card which means FREE bus travel within Hamilton and on buses coming from Huntly, Pukekohe, Raglan, Paeroa, Cambridge and Te Awamutu.

Total Mobility Scheme

<https://busit.co.nz/travelling-with-us/total-mobility/>

Accessibility and Buses

<https://busit.co.nz/travelling-with-us/accessibility/>

There are Workbridge support funds available to help with transport costs to and from work. Conditions apply.

Disclaimer: this fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult your doctor or other health professional for advice regarding your epilepsy.