

A Guide for Patients

ADHD and driving

A guide for teenagers learning to drive



What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a persistent pattern of behaviour seen in children, young people and adults. The three key features of ADHD are: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Physical hyperactivity is more apparent during childhood, whereas teenagers tend to be more easily distracted, often experiencing difficulty in sustaining attention in tasks or failing to follow through an instruction e.g. homework, chores or work-related duties.^{1,2}

How is ADHD managed?

Experts recommend that there should be a detailed plan put in place to manage patients with ADHD. This plan should include: behavioural strategies and support at home, educational support at school, psychological treatments and also, when needed, medication. If you are a teenager with ADHD, you may also need help and guidance with other things, including learning to drive safely.²

What are the risks associated with driving if I have ADHD?

Young drivers with ADHD are more likely to commit speeding offences and have a greater risk of being involved in an accident compared to drivers without ADHD.³

ADHD and driving

When can I start driving?

Most teenagers want to drive; in the UK, you are legally eligible to drive once you reach your 17th birthday and after passing a driving test.

Why is driving more dangerous for young people with ADHD?

Common factors leading to accidents in young drivers with ADHD are:³

- Inattention
- Greater likelihood of taking risks
- Difficulties following rules

These are behaviours often associated with people who have ADHD.

ADHD and driving

The DVLA

What should I do before I start driving?

- Before you learn to drive, you must apply for a provisional driving licence.
- According to law, you must inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) about any medical conditions you have, or prescribed medication, which affect your ability to drive.⁴
- You must tell the DVLA if your ADHD, or your ADHD medication, affects your ability to drive safely.⁴
- You can download an A1 form from the website, which you must complete and post back to the DVLA.⁴

What happens after I contact the DVLA?

A medical adviser from the DVLA may contact your GP or your Consultant for more information. They may also arrange for a further assessment to find out if you are medically fit to drive. You will then be issued with a provisional driving licence, if the DVLA is satisfied that you are fit to drive.

Insurance, driving lessons and tests

What about insurance?

It is important that you inform your insurance company about your medical condition before you start driving any vehicle.

About your driving lessons

- If you are paying someone for driving lessons, the driving instructor must be approved and registered with the Driving Standards Agency. They are called Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs).⁵
- An ADI must always display a green badge on the windscreen of the car while teaching you.⁵
- Always choose an ADI who is reliable and has a good reputation. Take advice from your parents, guardian or a responsible adult that you trust.
- Try to learn about the various aspects associated with driving safely, keep practising and check with your driving instructor when you can apply for the practical test.

About your driving test

You must have a valid provisional licence before you can apply for the theory test. As a learner driver, you are required to pass a theory test before the practical test

ADHD medications and driving

In some patients, medication may help to control ADHD symptoms, improving concentration and reducing hyperactive, as well as impulsive, behaviour.³

There are two different classes of ADHD medication:

- Stimulants
- Non-stimulants

If you are taking ADHD medication, it may influence your ability to drive and use machinery. If affected you should avoid potentially hazardous activities such as driving or operating machinery. Some ADHD medications are in the list of drugs included in regulations covered by section 5a of the Road Traffic Act, 1988.

ADHD and driving

How to be a safe driver

There are some simple rules you can follow that may help you drive more safely. As you will see, many of these rules are to help you pay attention, avoid distractions and control impulsive behaviour.

Agree reasonable restrictions

- Always get permission from your parent, guardian or carer before driving.
- Only drive the car approved by your parent, guardian or carer.
- Tell your parent, guardian or carer where you are going and when you will be back before every trip.
- Ensure the car is back home by the agreed time.
- Some friends can cause dangerous distractions. Your parents, guardian or carer may suggest a list of 'banned' passengers.

Rules while driving

- Never drive if you have drunk any alcohol or taken any illegal drugs.
- If you feel angry or sleepy, DO NOT drive.
- Always wear a seat belt.
- Keep to the speed limit and obey all traffic signs and laws.

Avoid distractions

- Turn off your mobile phone when driving.
- Do not eat or drink while driving.
- Keep any music down low and only use pre-set radio stations.

Be responsible

- Initially drive with an adult, even after you have passed your test.
- Start driving during the daytime before extending to evening hours.
- If prescribed, take your ADHD medication regularly. Taking your ADHD medication may help improve your driving performance and reduce safety risks.³
- Accept consequences. If you break the rules, you lose the privilege of driving for a set period of time.
- As you gain experience of driving, your parent, guardian or carer may lift some of the restrictions if you prove that you can drive safely.
- These rules should be reviewed regularly with your parent, guardian or carer. This will help you all to see how things are working out.

Useful resources

www.gov.uk/adhd-and-driving

www.gov.uk/driving-lessons-learning-to-drive/taking-driving-lessons

**Be Smart.
Be Sensible.
Be Safe.**

**References:**

- 1 The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; 5th Edition, American Psychiatric Association, 2013
- 2 NICE NG 87 published March 2018, updated September 2019.
- 3 Barkley RA. and Cox D. Journal of Safety Research 2007;38:113-128.
- 4 <https://www.gov.uk/adhd-and-driving> (date last accessed, February 2024)
- 5 <https://www.gov.uk/driving-lessons-learning-to-drive/taking-driving-lessons> (date last accessed, February 2024)

Acknowledgements:

Dr Chinnaiah Yemula, Consultant Community Paediatrician, Bedford. Dr Anita Mittal, Consultant Paediatrician, Bedford. Dr Samira Ajmal, Community Paediatrician, Bedford.