

# Driving after Concussion



Driving is an essential, everyday activity for many adults and older adolescents. Though we may not realise it, driving is a complex task that requires good vision, movement and thinking skills.

A concussion is a head injury that can result in a number of symptoms, which can affect a person's ability to operate a motor vehicle and drive safely.

| Symptom   | How this can affect safe driving ability   |
|---|--|
| <b>Poor concentration</b>                         | It may be easier to become distracted or confused if there is a lot happening. For example, It may be easier to become distracted, confused and/or overwhelmed if there is lot happening on the road |
| <b>Reduced reaction time</b>                      | Your response to hazards or changing road conditions may be slower than normal.  |
| <b>Difficulty switching or dividing attention</b> | Giving full attention to changing conditions or safe driving practices such as checking the vehicle's speed, mirrors and blind spots may be difficult.   |
| <b>Poor judgement</b>                             | It may be harder to anticipate what will happen, or to know what to do in situations.  |
| <b>Memory difficulties</b>                        | Forgetting directions, road rules and what to do in more complex road situations.  |
| <b>Altered vision</b>                             | Difficulty noticing or reading road signs, potential traffic hazards or judging distance and speed. Interpreting or reading the road may also be hard, which in turn can affect reaction time.       |
| <b>Impulsive behaviour</b>                        | Taking risks on the road, becoming frustrated or angry while driving and not considering consequences.   |
| <b>Altered thinking skills</b>                    | Thinking may be slower than usual, and making decisions in busy road conditions may be harder.   |

**Do not drive or operate heavy machinery for at least 24 hours after a concussion.**

## Alternatives to driving

While you are unable to drive after your concussion, other options include:

- Asking a family member or friend to drive
- Taxi or Rideshare services (e.g. Uber)
- Community/Volunteer transport (speak to your local council)
- Public transport
- Walking

Cycling may be another option, but it is best to avoid riding a bike if you are still experiencing concussion symptoms as this may put you at risk of another incident that can result in you sustaining another concussion.



## Returning to driving

Like other activities, you may need to return to driving slowly and in a gradual (stepwise) manner after a concussion.

The following driving practices may help you make a safe return to driving after a concussion.

- Minimise distractions (e.g. radio, music, podcasts, talking with passengers or on the phone via hands-free/Bluetooth)
- Minimise driving at night
- Drive short distances
- Drive on familiar routes
- Avoid following cars closely
- Avoid freeways at first
- Avoid driving in poor road conditions (e.g. wet roads, poor visibility)
- Avoid driving during busy times (e.g. peak hour traffic, busy/congested roads)
- Avoid towing items (e.g. trailers, caravans, horse floats)
- Plan ahead – give yourself plenty of time to get to and park at your destination

## What are the signs that you shouldn't drive?

It may be too early for you to return to driving if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Trouble turning your head (e.g. neck pain or stiffness)
- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to bright lights
- Dizziness/Vertigo
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Difficulty concentrating or paying attention
- Concussion symptoms that get worse or are triggered by driving

**If you are unsure whether it is safe for you to drive, talk to your doctor.**

## Check with your insurance company and workplace

Insurance companies usually require conditions that could affect a person's ability to drive to be disclosed, or the company may exclude cover. Contacting your insurance company to see if you are covered following a concussion may be a good idea.

If you drive for work you should check with your workplace to see if there are any concussion policies and procedures that need to be followed. Your employer may need you to get a medical clearance to return to work.

**More information** Connectivity Traumatic Brain Injury Australia is an Australia-wide not-for-profit organisation working to raise awareness of concussion and traumatic brain injury in the community. For more information on concussion, you can speak to your doctor, healthcare professional, or visit the Connectivity website at [www.connectivity.org.au](http://www.connectivity.org.au)

**Disclaimer** This flyer and the Connectivity website does not offer medical advice for individuals. If you have suffered a concussion, please seek medical advice.

**Acknowledgements** This flyer features some materials that has been adapted from the ANZ mTBI Guidelines, Headway - the Brain Injury Association (UK) Driving after brain injury (2020) and the New Zealand Transport Agency Fact Sheet 36 Head Injuries and Driving (2018).

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