

Strong painkillers and driving

This advice booklet was written taking current guidance from the Department for Transport into account.

How do painkillers affect people?

Strong painkillers can affect each person differently and may affect your ability to drive. They can make some people feel drowsy and some medications can have an effect on your reaction time.

Strong painkillers that are commonly prescribed by doctors include:

- **Morphine (MST, Zomorph, Oramorph)**
- **Oxycodone (Oxycontin, Longtec, Oxynorm)**
- **Fentanyl**
- **Buprenorphine (Butrans, Transtec)**

When should you not drive?

You should not drive if you:

- **Have started or changed the dose of your painkillers within the last 5 days.**
- **Feel drowsy after taking any medication either prescribed or bought over the counter.**
- **Feel unable to concentrate or make decisions.**
- **Have blurred or double vision.**
- **Have taken a 'rescue' dose of a potentially sedative painkiller within the last 24 hours (e.g. Oramorph or Oxynorm).**
- **Have been drinking alcohol or taking strong drugs which have not been prescribed or recommended by your doctor (e.g. cannabis).**

Restarting driving

Make sure your first trip is only a short distance on roads that you are familiar with, at a time when traffic is not too busy.

You might find it helpful if an experienced driver accompanies you, in case you find you are unable to complete the journey.

Car Insurance

You may need to inform your insurance company about your current state of health and inform them of any medications you are now taking. It is best to discuss your circumstances with your insurance company to ensure that you are covered.

Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

You do not need to inform the DVLA that you are starting to take a strong painkiller. However, they may need to be informed about any other information regarding your illness

Driving and the Law

A new drug driving law in England and Wales was reinforced from 2nd March 2015. It is now seen as a criminal offence to drive or be in control of a vehicle with certain drugs being above specified levels in the body, whether your driving is impaired or not. The law not only includes strong painkillers, but also includes further drugs that you may have been prescribed by your doctor, such as:

- **Ketamine**
- **Methylamphetamine**
- **Benzodiazepines e.g. Clonazepam, Diazepam, Lorazepam, Oxazepam and Temazepam**

What if I'm stopped by the police?

The police may use a roadside test to see if you have taken any of the drugs listed above. If the tests detect any relevant drugs, the type and level of the drugs in your body can be confirmed by a blood test taken at the police station.

You should ensure that you can provide evidence that you have been prescribed the medications and therefore consider taking a copy of your prescription with you whilst driving.

The law acknowledges that thousands of people will be driving safely whilst taking these drugs; and therefore provides you with a 'medical defence.'

This states you are not guilty of committing a driving offence if:

- **The drug was lawfully prescribed, supplied or purchased over the counter, for medical or dental purpose**

and

- **The drug was taken in accordance to the instructions given by the prescriber or the information provided with the medication.**

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However, if your driving is impaired due to taking these medications, you are guilty of breaking the law.

If you have any queries or require more information, please speak to a member of the clinical team or speak to your pharmacist or general practitioner.

For further information visit: www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law

References:

Department for Transport, (2014). Guidance for healthcare professionals on drug driving (online). Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-driving-and-medicine-advice-for-healthcare-professionals