Driving When You Have Parkinson’s Disease

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• how Parkinson’s Disease can affect your driving
• tips to help you improve your driving
• how to check if you are safe to drive
• what you can do if you can’t drive anymore
• who you can contact for help with your driving

The Edmond J. Safra Program in Parkinson’s Disease and The Morton & Gloria Shulman Movement Disorders Clinic

Toronto Western Hospital
7 McLaughlin Pavilion
399 Bathurst St., Toronto, ON M5T 2S8
Phone: 416 603 6422
Driving is a complex activity. To drive well, you need to think and move quickly and easily.

Parkinson’s disease (PD) can affect how you drive. Even if you have driven with no problems for many years, you may not be able to continue to drive with PD.

Driving is a privilege, not a right.

Can I still drive with Parkinson’s disease?

In the earlier stages of PD you can usually continue to drive. Your medicines will help control your symptoms.

Even in the early stages of PD, please avoid driving:
- at night
- during rush hour traffic
- when the weather is bad

How does PD affect my driving?

- Your arms, legs or hands can shake, even when you are relaxed.
- Stiff muscles can cause you to have less control of your head movements.
- You can be slow to move or freeze (not move at all), which can affect your ability to:
  - turn your steering wheel
  - move quickly to avoid things like children or animals running out on the road
  - push down on the brake or gas pedal
- PD can cause eye movement problems. This can affect your ability to see and follow what is around you.
• PD can affect your ability to think. Your memory may become worse. It may take you longer to judge situations and make decisions.
• Medicines you are taking for PD can cause you to become sleepy or confused. This can affect your driving.

What can I do to improve?

• Avoid driving when your medicines are not working as well or when you know you are feeling off (your symptoms are not well controlled). Plan to drive when your energy levels are better and during on periods.
• Stay fit and active. This will keep up your muscle strength. Do stretches that will keep you flexible enough to look over your shoulder.
• Keep good posture. If possible, sit with your back straight.
• Get rid of whatever could distract you while you drive.
• Choose routes that you are familiar with.
• Getting and using a Global Positioning System (GPS) can help you with directions.
• Drive only when you are well rested.
• Drive a little slower and keep a safe distance from other cars, people or objects
• Only drive short distances. Avoid long car trips.
How can I tell if it’s safe for me to drive?

Below are some signs that you are having trouble when you drive. Put a check \( \checkmark \) in the box if these things happen to you.

- My family members and friends tell me they are worried about my driving.
- I have trouble seeing road signs in time to respond to them.
- Other drivers often honk at me.
- Driving causes me to feel stressed.
- After driving, I feel tired.
- I have had or almost had more minor accidents lately.
- The glare from oncoming headlights bothers me.
- My medicines make me dizzy or drowsy.
- I have trouble turning the steering wheel.
- I have trouble pushing down on the gas pedal or brakes.
- I have trouble looking over my shoulder when I back up.
- My family and friends will no longer ride in the car if I’m driving.

If you checked any of the boxes, talk to your health care provider. They can help you learn ways to improve your safety when you drive.

Your health care provider is responsible to let the Ministry of Transportation know when they think it is unsafe for you to drive.
What can I do when Parkinson’s disease affects my driving?

- Eat healthy foods and exercise. This will help you keep the muscle strength you need to help you drive safely.
- Talk to your doctor about medicines and ways you can treat your symptoms of Parkinson’s disease.
- Have a qualified driving centre check or test your driving skills.
- Listen to any concerns that your family or friends have about your driving. Talk about this openly with your doctor.

What will I do if I can’t drive anymore?

It will take time to adjust to driving less or not driving at all. You can still control how and when you travel. Plan ahead of time so that you can still get to the places you want to go.

Here are some other ways to get around:

- getting rides with friends and family
- taking taxi cabs
  Taking a taxi can cost less than owning a car if you drive 6,500 kilometers or less a year. You don’t have to pay for gas, maintenance and repairs, insurance, registration or other costs.
- taking shuttle buses
- using public transit, trains, streetcars and subways
- using TTC Wheel Trans
- walking

Community centers and other support services often offer driving services for older adults.
To find out if your area has special driving services for seniors, call:

**Seniors’ INFOline**
Toll-free: 1-888-910-1999 or in Toronto 416 314 7511

**Who can I contact for help with my driving?**

**Help with licenses**

**Ministry of Transportation, Licensing Administration Office**
2680 Keele Street, Building A
Downsview, ON M3M 3E6
Phone: 1 800 387 3445 or 416 235 2999

**Help with driving skills**

**Drive Lab Inc.**
Phone: 905 851 9391
Email: info@wrigroup.ca

**Custom Rehab & Assessments Canada Ltd**
Phone: 416 484 1526

**Approved Driver Rehabilitation Centres for Driving Evaluations**

**Help with driving safety**

**Canada Safety Council**
Phone: 613 739 1566

**Canadian Automobile Association**
Phone: 613 247 0117