

Advice on Driving & Sleepiness

1. Ensuring the safety of other road users, pedestrians and passengers in your car, when you are driving, is your responsibility. If you are not safe at the wheel of a car, then you should not drive.
2. You should **never** drive while you are feeling tired (even if you are not actually feeling sleepy). This is because, even before sleepiness, your reaction time and attention to the road will be impaired. As a result of this, you could endanger the life and health of others, either pedestrians, other road users, or passengers.
3. If you believe that you can become sleepy without a warning of tiredness, then you must immediately cease any driving until this problem has completely resolved by treatment.
4. Causing harm to another person or to property as a result of feeling tired at the wheel of a vehicle, or as a result of falling asleep at the wheel (!), is no excuse in law. Make no mistake, if someone were to be killed as a result of such an event, you would be likely to be prosecuted for manslaughter and may go to prison. You have been warned.
5. You should completely avoid driving at the times that you tend to be sleepy.
6. If you have any tendency to become sleepy during the day, then you should also avoid driving for any longer than 2 hours at a time without a break with a nap. Depending on the severity of your sleepiness, this time may need to be shorter than 2 hours.
7. If you start to feel tired whilst you are driving, then you must immediately pull to the side of the road, stop the car and have a sleep.
8. It is advisable to carry, in the car, a flask of coffee or another caffeinated drink and consume this at the beginning of the nap. This is because the caffeine from the coffee will take about 30-45 minutes to have its effect.
9. If you have a tendency to daytime sleepiness, but the sleepiness is **always preceded by an adequate warning of tiredness, doesn't occur every day, doesn't occur when you doing other things (especially driving)**, and you are aware of **points 1-8 (above), and are willing and able to follow them**, then I may consider you safe to drive according to the DVLA guidance* and will not necessarily advise that you cease driving completely before treatment is started.

*The August 2018 DVLA Guide for Medical Professionals states the following:

Excessive sleepiness due to suspected obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome. Driving may resume only after satisfactory symptom control. If symptom control cannot be achieved in three months the DVLA must be notified.

This DVLA guidance for doctors does not clearly define “*excessive sleepiness*”. Neither does the DVLA define “*satisfactory symptom control*”. Despite some minor modifications after complaints from doctors, from the British Sleep Society (BSS) and the British Thoracic Society (BTS), this DVLA guidance, remains confusing and ambiguous. Guidance is not law and a doctor's primary duty is to the care of his or her patients, but doctors also have a duty in respect of the safety of the public at large. However, applying this DVLA guidance without recourse to careful consideration and common sense, would result in some patients, who are not in danger of becoming sleepy at the wheel, being unnecessarily stopped from driving. Like a number of my sleep colleagues and a position statement by the BTS (April 2018), I interpret “*excessive sleepiness*” in the DVLA guidance as sleepiness that is likely to occur at the wheel and thus pose a danger.

Dr Angus Nisbet, October 2018