

## Driving when you have had seizures

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- For most people, driving represents freedom, control and independence. Driving enables most people to get to the places they want or need to go. For many people, driving is important economically – some drive as part of their job or to get to and from work. Others drive to be able to shop for necessities, to maintain social connections or participate in activities.
- Driving is a complex skill. Our ability to drive safely can be affected by changes in our physical, emotional and mental condition. The goal of this brochure is to help you, your family and your health care professional talk about how having had one or more seizures may affect your ability to drive safely.

## How can having a seizure affect my driving?

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- Having a seizure can cause you to lose control of your body, change the way you act and sense things, or make you pass out suddenly. If you have a seizure while you are driving, you could lose control of your car and cause a crash. You could hurt yourself and others.

## Can I still drive if I have had seizures?

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- Many people who have had seizures are able to return to driving once their seizures are under control. But your

return to safe driving after one or more seizures depends on the following key factors:

- ◆ the cause of your seizure;
  - ◆ the type of seizure you typically have;
  - ◆ the laws of the state in which you are licensed; and
  - ◆ how long you have been free of seizures that affect your awareness.
- A seizure may happen when someone has a severe head injury or a very high fever, or an infection of the brain, and it may only happen once. Other types of seizures are caused by a seizure disorder (also known as epilepsy), and can happen more than once unless treated with long-term medication. Your doctor can tell you about the type of seizure(s) you have had, and also can give you treatment options.
  - Some states do not allow you to drive if you have had even one seizure affecting consciousness, regardless of the cause, until you have not had any more seizures for a period of time specified in that state.

## How long will I have to wait before I can get my license back?

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- It varies from three months to a year, depending on the laws in your state. If your doctor has diagnosed you as having a seizure disorder, states will require that you are treated for that condition with medication designed to prevent seizures

and that your seizures are under reliable control before the state will allow you to drive.

- Check with your Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to find out about the law in your state, or check the Epilepsy Foundation website at [www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/Legal/transit/drivelaw/](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/Legal/transit/drivelaw/).
- Your doctor may have to write a letter to your DMV stating that you are under treatment and that the medicines are keeping you from having any seizures.

## I don't pass out or blank out during my seizures. Can I drive?

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- That depends on the laws in your state. Some states will license people with seizure disorders if they only have seizures during sleep (nocturnal epilepsy), or if they have simple partial seizures in which they remain aware and able to drive safely.
- Some people have a long aura (or warning) before a seizure, allowing them to pull safely off the road. In some states, a doctor's statement to that effect will allow a person to get a restricted license.

## What can I do when seizures affect my driving?

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- Ask your doctor about medicines that are designed to prevent seizures and how those medicines might affect your ability to drive a car safely.



## What if I have to give up driving?

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- You can keep your independence even if you have to give up driving until you have been seizure-free for long enough to get your license back. It may take planning ahead on your part, but planning will help get you to the places you want to go and the people you want to see. Consider:
  - ◆ rides with family and friends;
  - ◆ taxi cabs;
  - ◆ shuttle buses or vans;
  - ◆ public buses, trains and subways; and
  - ◆ walking.
- Senior centers and religious and other local service groups often offer transportation services for older adults in your community.


## Who can I call for help with transportation?

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-  Call the ElderCare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 and ask for the phone number of your local Office on Aging, or go to their website at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).
- Contact your regional transit authority, which can tell you which bus or train to take.
-  Call Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation) at 1-800-659-6428 or go to their website at [www.easterseals.com/transportation](http://www.easterseals.com/transportation).

## Where do I find out more about seizures and their treatment?

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- Your first step is to talk with your doctor. You also can contact the:
  -  Epilepsy Foundation  
1-800-332-1000  
[www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org)
- You can get a copy of the “Epilepsy Information Page” from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke at [www.ninds.nih.gov/health\\_and\\_medical/disorders/epilepsy.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/health_and_medical/disorders/epilepsy.htm)
- You also can get a copy of the “Age Page On Older Drivers” from the National Institute on Aging by calling 1-800-222-2225, or by going to their website at [www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp](http://www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp)

## Wear your safety belt

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Always wear your safety belt when you are driving or riding in a car. Make sure that every person who is riding with you also is buckled up. Wear your safety belt even if your car has air bags.



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