Return to driving after mild head injury
Information for patients, carers and their families

Driving is a key role and responsibility for many of us however, the skills required to drive safely are often taken for granted.

A mild head injury and associated post concussion symptoms can impact on your usual capability to drive. This fact sheet aims to help you understand symptoms to monitor and the recommended stages to return to driving after a mild brain injury.

Research suggests that even mild thinking difficulties, which may not be obvious to the head injured person, may add to increased risks while driving so it is important for those around you to be involved in decisions about when to return to driving.

Skills can be lost, disrupted or slowed down for example:

- **Senses**: vision, hearing and feeling in your hands and feet.
- **Thinking**: Concentration, memory, safety awareness, judgment and problem solving.
- **Physical**: Weakness, tiredness, hand-eye coordination, seizures.
- **Behaviour**: frustration and impatience.

Warning signs of unsafe driving

- Driving too fast/slow
- Not observing signs or signals
- Judging distance inaccurately when stopping or turning
- Slow to make decisions or slow reaction response
- Becoming easily frustrated or confused
- Having accidents or near misses
- Drifting across lane markings into other lanes
- Getting lost easily, even in familiar areas
- Increase to post concussion symptoms.

Recommendations

- Do not drive for a minimum of 24 hours following a mild head injury.
- If there are post concussion symptoms (see Mild Head Injury Advice handout) or complications that result in a loss or slowing of skills (as listed above, do not drive until symptoms have resolved AND you have been medically cleared by a doctor).
- Commercial vehicle drivers must meet higher medical standards due to their work demands. Seek medical advice regarding any further assessments requirements prior to a return to commercial driving and inform your employer.

What if I drive before a doctor clears me?

Jet’s Law (2008) states that if a driver has an unstable medical condition which may affect their ability to drive safely, they need medical clearance before driving again. If you are involved in a crash and your health condition was a contributing factor, you may be prosecuted. Or, your insurance may not cover you.

References


