

# Driving Guidelines and Diabetes

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## Driving and Diabetes

Low blood sugar levels (< 4.0mmol/L) can affect your driving performance and judgement and may cause you to lose consciousness while driving, leading to a motor vehicle accident which can harm you and others. Vision problems, nerve damage, heart and kidney disease, and blocked arteries may also affect your driving capabilities.

Because these factors are different from person to person, people with diabetes have the right to be assessed for a driver's licence on an individual basis. Medical evaluations are needed to document any complications and to assess blood sugar control, including how often one experiences low blood sugars (hypoglycemia) and the severity of these hypoglycemic events.

## Requirements for ALL Drivers with Diabetes

People with diabetes should:

- Have their fitness to drive assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- Have a driver's medical examination every 2 years.
- Take an active role in helping to assess their ability to drive by maintaining accurate medical records, accurate blood sugar logs and an accurate blood glucose meter.
- Be able to demonstrate how to avoid, recognize and treat low blood sugars properly.

### Driving Guidelines (Private and Commercial) for People Treated with Insulin or Taking Medications that Can Cause Hypoglycemia:

Drivers should:

- **CHECK** blood sugar immediately before and at least every 4 hours during long drives. Always carry a glucose meter, fast acting sugar and appropriate snacks in the vehicle that are within reach (ex. attached to the sun visor).
- If you are at higher risk of hypoglycemia (unaware of lows, history of severe hypoglycemia), check blood sugars every 2 hours.
- **DO NOT** drive when blood sugar is less than 4.0mmol/L. If blood sugar is less than 4.0mmol/L, treat with rapid acting sugar and **DO NOT** drive for at least 45 minutes *after* blood sugar rises above 5.0 mmol/l. If blood sugar is between 4.0-5.0mmol/L, have a snack with carbohydrate before driving.
- **STOP** and **TREAT** with fast acting sugar as soon as a low blood sugar and/or impaired driving is suspected. **DO NOT** drive until at least 45 minutes *after* blood sugar has risen above 5.0 mmol/l.
- If severe hypoglycaemia occurs, refrain from driving immediately and **NOTIFY** your healthcare provider of the event immediately (no longer than 72 hours).

- Persons with diabetes who control their diabetes with diet and lifestyle alone or diet and lifestyle combined with taking oral diabetes medications are at low risk of a severe low blood sugar and can usually drive all types of motor vehicles if they remain under regular medical supervision.
- A full eye examination is required at least once per year
- Drivers with well-managed diabetes no longer need to provide annual driver medical reports in Alberta, pending the approval of their physician
- Driver medical reports will continue to be required:
  - at the onset of the disease;
  - when the status of the condition has changed, as determined by a physician or reported by the individual;
  - for individuals with both acute and chronic complications of the disease;
  - when an individual has suffered a severe hypoglycemic episode, or an episode of hypoglycemic unawareness as determined by a physician or reported by the individual; and,
  - at the standard operator's license renewal cycle based on the age or class of license.

## Commercial Drivers Treated with Insulin or Taking Medications that Can Cause Hypoglycemia

- Persons with diabetes who drive commercially may be at increased risk for highway accidents compared to private drivers because on average they spend more of their time behind the wheel and travel longer distances. Their job description may also require intermittent heavy labor and shift work.
- In addition to the standard requirements to apply for a commercial licence, people using insulin to manage diabetes also must meet more strict standards to ensure the safety of themselves and others.
- Commercial Drivers Licence may be revoked if you have had low blood sugars within the last 6 months that have required the assistance by an outsider to provide treatment or that have resulted in a loss of consciousness. Hypoglycemia unawareness, A1C greater than 12%, more than 10% of blood glucose levels below 4.0 mmol/l or the presence of certain complications can also result in the loss of a commercial licence.
- The following are exclusion criteria for obtaining or maintaining a commercial license in persons with diabetes who are taking insulin or taking medications that can cause hypoglycemia:
  1. Any episode of severe hypoglycemia while awake in the last 12 months
  2. Any hypoglycemia unawareness in the last 12 months
  3. Visual impairment that does not meet the minimum standard for visual acuity in the jurisdiction in which the individual is licensed
  4. Peripheral neuropathy, amputation or cardiovascular disease of sufficient severity to affect the ability to drive safely
  5. Failure to complete a medical assessment at least every 2 years
  6. Inadequate record of self-monitoring of blood glucose (i.e. unreliable or absent finger poke blood glucose measurements)
  7. Inadequate knowledge of the causes, symptoms and treatments of hypoglycemic episodes.