



From the desktop

Driving and diabetes: Notifying the authorities

Karen Thorne

As a Credentialed Diabetes Educator (CDE), I often have appointments with newly diagnosed people with diabetes. When we start to explore their understanding of diabetes, in particular in respect to driving and the individual's obligation to disclose their diabetes diagnosis to the driving authorities, I am often met with a blank look. Most people with diabetes remain unaware that, with the exception of type 2 diabetes controlled by lifestyle, it is illegal not to disclose their diabetes diagnosis to the driving authorities. The driving and diabetes booklet from the National Diabetes Service Scheme (NDSS, 2011) for people with diabetes states:

“It is your legal responsibility to advise the Driving Licence Authority (DLA) in your State or Territory if you take glucose lowering medications including insulin. If you are treated with diet and exercise only for your diabetes, notification requirements vary across different

jurisdictions and you should check with the DLA requirements in your state or territory.”

As well as notifying the authorities at diagnosis, people with diabetes must review their licence with the driving authority in their state or territory on a set basis and if there are changes to their medication (*Table 1*). If in the consultation room patients are resistant to notifying the authorities, it might be helpful to remind them that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority requires both air traffic controllers and pilots to have annual reviews and tight glycaemic control ($HbA_{1c} < 58$ mmol/mol [$< 7.5\%$]), and as such it is just as important that road users are in glycaemic range while driving. Many do accept the legislation's role in maintaining their safety and the safety of other road users, the main hazard for people with diabetes being unexpected hypoglycaemia for those who take insulin or glucose-lowering medications. Most

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About this series

The aim of the “From the desktop” series is to provide practical expert opinion and comment from the clinic. In this issue, Karen Thorne advocates more awareness of the legal requirement to report a diabetes diagnosis to the driving authorities.

Table 1. Austroad requirements for notifying driving authorities of a diabetes diagnosis and frequency of licence reviews (Austroad, 2012).

| Diabetes type | Private licence | Commercial licence |
|---|--|--|
| Type 2 diabetes controlled with diet and exercise alone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Driver not required to notify DLA between licence renewals (except in Victoria)* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Driver not required to notify DLA between licence renewals (except in Victoria)* |
| Type 2 diabetes on glucose-lowering agents other than insulin | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews every 5 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews annually |
| Type 2 diabetes on insulin | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews every 2 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews annually |
| Type 1 diabetes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews every 2 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must notify DLA of diagnosis ● Reviews annually |

*Check individual state and territory requirements.
DLA=Driving Local Authority.

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Table 2. Common myths and truths of diabetes and driving.

| Common myths | Truths |
|--|--|
| “I don’t have to tell Austroads. It’s none of their business.” | You must report type 1 and type 2 diabetes treated with oral or injectable glucose-lowering medication. |
| “Austroads just want to take my licence. I need it to work”. | Austroads requires safe and responsible driving on roads and waterways. |
| “Austroads is discriminating against people with diabetes”. | There are many other notifiable conditions such as epilepsy, portable oxygen therapy use or opioids that require notification, not just diabetes. |
| “I can drive fine with a blood glucose reading of under 4 mmol/L on my meter”. | You must test your blood glucose before driving and ensure that it is above 5 mmol/L (Above 5 to drive!). Blood glucose should be tested every 2 hours to ensure that it remains at 5 mmol/L or above. |
| “I don’t have to tell them if I ride a motorbike or a boat”. | You need to report your diabetes diagnosis to Austroads if you have a boat or motorbike. |
| “I don’t have to report diabetes if I’m on L plates”. | You need to report your diabetes even if you hold a Learner’s permit. |

hypoglycaemic episodes can be prevented and the NDSS (2011) provides guidelines for what to do before driving and throughout a journey. Even so, many people are anxious or angry at the thought of potentially losing their licence; so much so, that I’ve received verbal abuse and some people have left the consultation determined to defy the law!

Awareness

Why is it that the majority of people with diabetes are unaware of the law? In my experience, many people who have been referred to me have not been informed, or can not remember being told, of this legislation. The NDSS welcome pack for people with newly diagnosed with diabetes does have a small reference to driving and diabetes, but it is in English only and in quite small font (NDSS, 2016). In my opinion, this does not highlight the importance that the issue commands, and as such, it often falls to healthcare professionals to raise the issue and dispel any myths or misinformation that patients may have picked up along the way (Table 2).

Although more needs to be done to raise awareness of the importance of notifying driving authorities, it can not be ignored that many drivers with diabetes are reluctant to disclose their diagnosis due to fear of loss of income, licence and independence, which can be especially felt by

commercial drivers. This leads one to suspect that perhaps in some cases, patients have “forgotten” that they have been told or read this information, in a bid to delay informing the authorities. In addition, when patients do do the right thing and report their diabetes, they receive a letter from Austroads requiring the submission of a written report from their treating doctor within 28 days or their licence will be suspended. This can encourage fearfulness and mistrust, so it is equally important to raise awareness of the procedure of reporting diabetes to the driving authorities.

Driving is such an important part of many people’s lives, so an urgent awareness campaign on driving and diabetes is required for people with diabetes and healthcare professionals with the aim of allaying fears and suspicion. There should be more information in the NDSS welcome pack and, although the “diabetes and driving” leaflet includes all the relevant information, a big, nationwide media campaign is required to raise awareness among people with and without diabetes. ■

Austroads (2012) *Assessing fitness to drive for commercial and private vehicle drivers*. Austroads Ltd, Sydney, NSW. Available at: <https://www.onlinepublications.austroads.com.au/items/AP-G56-13> (accessed 31.08.16)

NDSS (2011) *Diabetes and driving*. Australian Diabetes Society, Sydney, NSW. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2bC7O83> (accessed 31.08.16)

NDSS (2016) *Information for people with diabetes*. Australian Diabetes Society, Sydney, NSW. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1pmHY9O> (accessed 31.08.16)