

The Driving Assessment Process

1. Why would your Doctor refer you for a driver assessment?

A change of medical condition can affect your ability to drive safely. This may follow a head injury, stroke, spinal injury, amputation or may be due to Parkinson's disease or the ageing process. If your doctor has any concerns about your skills for driving they may refer you to an Occupational Therapist for a driver assessment.

Sometimes you are required to provide a medical certificate as part of your driver licence application – again your GP may request a medical driver assessment before they are able to sign the medical certificate.

The purpose of the assessment is to make recommendations about if, or when, you can resume driving, or whether any conditions should be placed on your driving.

Note: The medical driver assessment is not a driver licence test.

2. Who pays for the driver assessment?

Funding arrangements for driver assessments vary. ACC may fund assessments for ACC claimants. In some cases, Ministry of Health disability funding may be available to pay for the driver assessment. In other cases, you will be required to pay the cost of a driver assessment.

3. What does the driver assessment involve?

Assessments are conducted by Occupational Therapists that specialise in driver assessments. These usually begin with an off-road assessment in the therapist's office. This part of the assessment may take up to two hours. After that, the Occupational Therapist will take you for an on-road driver assessment.

When you come for your assessment you must bring your driver licence and any relevant letter from your doctor or the licensing authority. If you normally wear glasses to drive and/or read, you will need them for this assessment.

4. What is the off-road assessment?

Occupational Therapists use the off-road assessment to check that a person's physical, thinking and decision-making abilities are up to the standard required for safe driving.

It's a comprehensive assessment of:

- Vision (basic screening)
- Physical function such as range of movement, strength, sensation and coordination
- Judgment
- Memory
- Movement and decision-making times
- How your mind understands what you see
- Knowledge of road rules and signs

5. Questions you can expect

During the off-road assessment the therapist is likely to ask you:

- Where you normally drive
- What type of car you drive
- Whether your driver licence is current
- If you have any physical problems that may affect your driving; such as limited movement, strength and coordination
- Whether there are any problems with your vision
- About road rules and intersections rules

The therapist may use a computer-based tool to look at your reaction times, movement and decision speeds.

You don't need to know how to use a computer. All you need to do is react to what you see on the screen, using pedals and a steering wheel. The results of this off-road assessment give a good indication of your ability to drive safely.

The on-road assessment

An on-road driver assessment assesses the impact of disability, illness or ageing on your medical fitness to drive.

6. What happens during the drive?

The on-road assessment will be undertaken in a suitable vehicle at the discretion of the Occupational Therapist assessor.

During the on-road assessment, you will be accompanied by a trained driving instructor and the Occupational Therapist (some Occupational Therapists can do both). The driving instructor will sit beside you and give you directions about where to drive and when to turn. The Occupational Therapist will be assessing your medical fitness to drive.

7. Where will you be asked to drive?

This assessment includes a range of driving situations such as high and low speed zones, controlled and uncontrolled intersections, parking and manoeuvring. The on-road assessment may involve approximately 40 – 60 minutes of driving. The drive will include situations that you would normally face when driving in your local area, such as the local shopping area and suburban back streets, and may include a motorway if appropriate.

8. After the assessment

After the assessment, the Occupational Therapist will discuss your assessment performance with you and write a report outlining his/her observations and provide a professional recommendation.

The report is sent to your doctor (and/or the person who asked for you to be assessed). Your doctor reviews the report, and then decides whether or not he/she considers you medically fit to drive and if any conditions should be placed on your driving. If conditions need to be placed on your licence the report may be sent to the licensing authority. The Occupational Therapist can assist with any vehicle modifications you may require.

If your doctor signs the medical certificate confirming you are fit to drive, then you can continue with your driver licensing application.

Note: Occupational Therapists and Doctors have no power to take your driver licence from you. Only the New Zealand Transport Agency can revoke someone's licence.

9. Motor vehicle modifications and retraining

In some instances, due to an individual's physical limitations, some form of motor vehicle modifications may be necessary in order for a person to continue to drive safely. The Laura Fergusson Assessment Team has we have a modified assessment vehicle that enables our assessors to gauge the ability of a driver to utilize a range of modifications to facilitate the next stage in independent driving. Driver training may also be indicated where there are specific areas that the assessor has identified and is usually required when a vehicle has been modified. HAT has long standing relationships with vehicle modification and driver training services which can be engaged in the next stage of the process.

10. Complaints

If you have a complaint to make about the person who conducted your driver assessment, in the first instance please contact the Clinical Manager for the Laura Fergusson Assessment Team.

Contact details:

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