

DRIVING WITH DYSPRAXIA



Learning to drive is a challenge for many, and for those with dyspraxia it can be especially daunting. From concentration and hand-foot coordination to judging speed and distance and sequencing, driving makes heavy demands on some of the core dyspraxic weaknesses. Many people with dyspraxia are unaware of the support available to them as learner-drivers or even unsure whether they can or should drive.

Can I drive?

There is no specific legislation around driving with dyspraxia. Dyspraxia is not listed as a notifiable condition by the DVLA and you don't normally need to disclose it when applying for a license or insurance. **However, you should always tell the DVLA if you feel your health is likely to affect your driving in any way** <https://www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions>.

Should I drive?

Whether you decide to learn to drive, or can pass a test successfully, depends on:

- **How much time and money you have available.** Every learner is different and every person with dyspraxia is different. Instructors estimate that an “average” learner needs around 40 to 50 hours of lessons to pass their test. For someone with dyspraxia this is probably a minimum. An experienced, sympathetic driving instructor will make a difference. Whether you've mastered any other hands-on activity (such as cooking, video gaming, playing a musical instrument, or some form of exercise) can also be an indication of how you'll cope with driving.
- **Where you live and work, and how good public transport links are**
- **How important driving is to your job, or desired job**
- **The severity of your dyspraxia.** In extreme cases, diagnosing professionals have advised against driving
- **Any other conditions or health problems you have.**

What support can I get?

The following help is available for learner drivers with dyspraxic difficulties:

HAZARD PERCEPTION APP

The British School of Motoring's interactive Hazard Perception App is designed to prepare you for your theory test, and assess and improve key skills related to driving. The app is available for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch <https://www.bsm.co.uk/existing-pupils-hub/hazard-perception-app>

DRIVING SIMULATORS

Major driving schools offer driving simulators with geared cars which can help build confidence away from the pressures of the open road.

AUTOMATIC CARS

Learning in an automatic car will lessen the amount of multi-tasking involved in driving. All major driving schools, and specialist driving instructors, should offer you the option. However you may like to ask to ensure you get the chance to try both. ***If you pass your test using an automatic car, you will not be licensed to drive a manual car.***

CAR ADAPTATIONS

Larger, higher-mounted steering wheels and extra wing and rear-view mirrors for reversing may be helpful. Companies such as AutoChair, Vauxhall Mobility and Jubilee Mobility specialise in vehicle adaptations. Mobility Centres (see below) can assess your adaptability needs.

MOBILITY CENTRES

A number of assessment centres throughout the country offer information and advice to drivers who have a disability and assess them in a safe environment to establish their capabilities. An assessment can be useful if you are concerned about your ability to drive safely, or to find out how and whether an adapted vehicle could help you. Contact The Forum of Mobility Centres www.mobility-centres.org.uk, or telephone **0800 559 3636** for further advice and information about self-referral. Centres deal with a multitude of disabilities, so make sure you ask to speak to a staff member who specifically understands dyspraxia.

THE THEORY TEST

You will need to pass your theory test before you can take your practical test. It is valid for two years so if you don't pass your practical test by then you'll need to retake your theory test. Those with reading difficulties are entitled to extra time to complete the test, and a voiceover to read the questions. The Hazard Perception section tests your ability to respond to potential hazards on the road by watching a series of video clips of typical driving situations and clicking when you see a developing hazard. Make sure you don't click the mouse too hard or too fast, or the software will think you're trying to cheat and you'll score zero for that clip.

INDEPENDENT DRIVE

The Independent Drive element of the driving test, introduced in 2010, can seem particularly intimidating to people with dyspraxia. It requires you to drive for ten minutes using a series of directions and traffic signs, as you would in a real-life situation, rather than taking step-by-step instructions from the examiner. Speak to your instructor and ask for extra help and guidance if you are concerned. However, it's important to remember that Independent Drive is *not* a test of your orientation and navigational skills: it doesn't matter if you don't remember every direction, or go the wrong way.

SPECIALIST DRIVING INSTRUCTORS

While most instructors will cater for learners with disabilities, some have considerably more experience than others. It is worth asking what experience/additional training our instructor has. A specialist instructor can help you with the breaking down of tasks and sequences, as well as concentration and nerves. *The Dyspraxia Foundation does not specifically recommend or endorse any driving schools or instructors.*

The UK Forum of Mobility Centres has details of instructors who are qualified to teach people with disabilities, and may also have their own accredited staff. Please see the 'Mobility' section of this page. <http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk/services/tuition.htm>

The following organisation may also be able to help you find a driving instructor in your area <http://www.driving.org/member-finder>

Tips on choosing a driving instructor:

If you can't find a specialist driving instructor in your area, here are some general tips:

- **Choose a friendly driving school.** Learners with dyspraxia may be better served by experienced, independent instructors than big-name driving schools. Choose a school which will let you discuss your needs with your instructor before you commit to anything, rather than booking through a call centre or website.
- **Tell your instructor about your dyspraxia.** It may help to take information about dyspraxia with you to your first lesson or before you book, so that your instructor can understand your needs and adapt strategies which may help your understanding. You can download information to share from the DF website. www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
- **You may want to explain any sensory issues you have,** for instance, problems with glare from the sun or headlights. You may also want to consider seeing an optician for 'nightglare' glasses or similar.
- **Know what helps you.** A good instructor should be happy to write things down or use visual aids when explaining things to you. Physical cues for estimating speed and distance may also be helpful. As some people with dyspraxia can have difficulty with concentrating for long periods of time, you may want to request that you have frequent breaks during lessons and that information is broken down in to small parts for you.
- **Ask for feedback from your instructor** Your instructor should regularly let you know how they feel you're progressing. Everyone learns at different rates, but if you haven't reached test standard after more than 100 hours of consecutive lessons, or have failed your test after several attempts, it may be that your instructor is not right for you.

General Driving Tips

- Practice observing traffic as a passenger
- If you live in a rural area, practice driving off-road and on Green Lanes. Playing video games can also improve coordination and reactions. If you've done these things from an early age you may find learning to drive easier.
- Marking the left and right side of the steering wheel with coloured stickers, letters or a mnemonic can help if you struggle to differentiate left and right
- Use Satnavs, plan journeys, and 'rehearse' important journeys once or twice beforehand wherever possible
- Take frequent breaks or share driving if you find concentration difficult

- Never drink and drive, even within the limit
- Avoid or postpone driving when you are angry, over-excited or anxious, especially if you are an inexperienced driver. If you are travelling to a particularly stressful event such as a job interview or funeral it may be safer to use public transport or arrange a lift.
- Even if you don't drive, it's a good idea to memorise some helpful "markers" and basic driving directions to and from important destinations, to help taxi drivers, visitors and anyone who is giving you lifts. If you struggle with this, use Google Maps on your Smartphone, which works like a SatNav

Please note that the information in this factsheet relates to cars and private driving. There are stricter medical standards for commercial drivers, due to the added public safety implications and the amount of time spent on the road.

Government advice:

Booking your theory test <https://www.gov.uk/practical-driving-test-for-cars/special-needs>

Booking your practical test <https://www.gov.uk/driving-theory-test/if-you-have-special-needs>

Practicing your driving theory test (free) <https://www.gov.uk/practise-your-driving-theory-test>

Further information:

The motoring section of The Daily Telegraph published an article on driving with dyspraxia in 2011, written by journalist Maxine Frances Roper who has dyspraxia:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/motoring/road-safety/8252720/Driving-with-dyspraxia.html>

A blog post about learning to drive by a young woman with dyspraxia

<https://dyspraxichickhannah.wordpress.com/2015/06/08/dyspraxia-me-driving/>

Further information available from:

Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1EG

Helpline Tel: 01462 454986

Admin Tel: 01462 455016

Fax: 01462 455052

Web: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

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