

# 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 DVSA and you don't normally need to disclose it when applying for a Provisional licence or insurance. ***However, you should always tell the DVSA 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. 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, professionals working with dyspraxia have advised that a person is unlikely to be able to drive safely, or should only drive an automatic car. If you receive support for your dyspraxia from an occupational therapist or neurologist, they may recommend that you have your driving ability assessed before applying for a Provisional Licence.
- **Any other conditions or health problems you have.**

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO LEARN TO DRIVE?

Instructors who are asked say they have taught pupils in anything from less than 10 hours to nearer 200, with an 'average' of around 50. There are no official statistics for the number of lessons or hours taken, only test attempts. Pass rates also vary considerably from place to place. If you're dyspraxic it is probably best to assume that you will not be the fastest to learn to drive. You should aim to learn to drive safely, not quickly.

## WHAT SUPPORT CAN I GET WITH LEARNING TO DRIVE?

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

### 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. ***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 **Regional Driving Assessment Centres** at <http://www.rdac.co.uk/> for further advice and information about self-referral. Depending on where you live, waiting lists can range from weeks to a couple of years long.

## 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 the mouse when you see a developing hazard. 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>

## INDEPENDENT DRIVE & SAT NAV DRIVING

The Independent Drive element of the driving test can seem particularly intimidating to people with dyspraxia. It involves driving for 20 minutes either using a SatNav or following traffic signs. Most tests (around 4 in 5) will use a SatNav. The idea of this is to prepare you for real-life driving, rather than taking step-by-step instructions from the examiner. The Independent Drive lasts for around half the length of the test. Speak to your instructor and ask for extra help and guidance if you are concerned. Ideally, practice using a SatNav and following road signs with your instructor before your test. However, 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 as long as you still drive safely. People often become over-fixated with understanding directions and forget what's around them, or panic and do something sudden, which can be dangerous. If you make a mistake with the SatNav, it will automatically reroute you. It will also repeat instructions as you approach a turn or roundabout.

## DURING THE TEST

When you book a driving test, you will be asked whether you have a disability or health condition and given the opportunity to list any special requirements. You can ask the examiner to give instructions in plenty of time, repeat them, and phrase them in a way you find most helpful. You can ask for more time to complete manoeuvres where safe, and you are allowed to use stickers or draw markers in any safe place around the car to use as memory aids or reference points. The examiner can also give you hand signals for left and right.

## 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 your instructor has. A specialist instructor can help you with the breaking down of tasks and sequences, as well as concentration and nerves.

**Disabled Driving Instructors** may be able to help you find a specialist instructor in your area: <https://www.disabilitydrivinginstructors.com/>

A number of specialist instructors post regularly at online support forums for adults with dyspraxia.

*The Dyspraxia Foundation is unable to recommend or endorse specific driving schools or instructors.*

## TIPS ON CHOOSING A DRIVING INSTRUCTOR:

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

- **Choose an instructor who is well-established** 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.

- **Choose an instructor who is patient** It is not a good sign if your instructor seems baffled that driving doesn't come naturally to you, or has very fixed ideas about how long skills should take to learn. Even if they have never taught someone with dyspraxia, an instructor with experience of nervous pupils will make learning much easier.
- **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 Dyspraxia Foundation website. [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://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, particularly after practicing manoeuvres, which can be most tiring.
- **Ask for feedback from your instructor** Your instructor should regularly let you know how they feel you're progressing.

## AFTER YOUR TEST

After you've been focused on passing your test for a long time, the reality of driving on your own can take some getting used to.

- **Prepare to adjust to a new car** Older cars respond differently to newer ones and petrol cars differently to diesel. If you're driving a different car to the one you learned or practised in, stick to quiet, familiar roads until you feel comfortable handling the car. Make sure you know where the main controls are and can confidently use them while you're driving - especially the lights, demisters and windscreen wipers.
- **Build up your confidence gradually** If it helps, and if possible, continue to drive with someone experienced for a while until you're used to normal driving. The week after passing your test may not be the best time to pick up an important client, drive a new company car, or drive in a strange town or country.
- **Keep driving** It is best to drive regularly rather than have to do a long drive when you haven't driven for a long time.
- Using a 'P' plate may help confidence that other road users are aware you are a novice

## 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.
- Many driving instructors have their own YouTube channels, where they post recordings of their lessons, mock tests and general driving tips to help others. These can be a useful way to carry on with your learning in-between lessons.
- 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.
- Be aware of situations which may affect your driving. Stress, anger, hormones, hunger, dehydration and lack of sleep can all have a negative effect on driving, especially if you are inexperienced. If you are travelling to a particularly stressful event, such as an interview, important meeting or funeral, it may be safer to use public transport or arrange a lift.
- 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 HGV drivers, due to the added public safety implications and the amount of time spent on the road.**

**DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) websites:**

**Book your theory test:** <https://www.gov.uk/book-theory-test>:

**Book your practical test:** <https://www.gov.uk/book-driving-test>

**Practice for your theory test:** <https://www.gov.uk/take-practice-theory-test>

Both sites include information about special requirements when you book, as well as helpful information about driving and the law.

**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](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

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