**Drivers – Are you roadworthy?**

A person in a vest looking at a van

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Do you ever stop to wonder if you are fit to drive? Most of us think of driving as a physically undemanding activity, so ‘fitness’ might not seem to apply.

Truth is, it’s absolutely relevant because your physical health and state of mind can have profound effects on your safety.

If you don’t take care of yourself, driving can also be bad for your health because you are sitting still for long periods of time and might not get sufficient chance to exercise, hydrate or eat well.

**Here’s what you need to know:**

**- If you have a ‘notifiable’ medical condition, you must tell DVLA.** This is because some conditions can affect your ability to drive safely. For most conditions, with a doctor’s approval and treatment, most people can continue driving.

- **If you haven’t had a sight test in the past two years, do it now**. A formal sight test checks all the aspects of vision you need for driving, and can also flag more general health issues. If you need corrective lenses, get them and wear them – it will make driving much safer, but also less stressful and tiring. Opticians may be able to help with headlight glare, and night vision, as well as distance vision.

**- Visit your GP. If you are 40 years old or more, you will be eligible for a free NHS Health Check.** This gives you a complete MOT. Currently only 38% of men bother attending, but this is a great opportunity to either get a clean bill of health, or to identify potential problems and treat them early, before they impact your quality of life.

**- Don’t ignore pain or problems.** Even if you don’t want to take time off work to travel to your GP surgery, many now offer phone appointments. Pharmacists may also be able to help. It’s much better to get something checked early and dealt with. That way you won’t worry about it, which is a distraction when you are driving. Generally, you have a much better chance of speedy recovery when you get early treatment. Ignoring things will often just make it worse.



**- Any medication you take – prescribed or over the counter – must be compatible with driving.**

**- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water during the day –** the usual advice is about two litres. If you sip it throughout the day, you won’t need to urinate as much as if you gulp down long drinks. Being even slightly dehydrated starts to cloud your ability to think straight and makes you less safe.

**- Eat well. Plan good food for your working days.** Think about adding nutrition and fibre with every mouthful, rather than wasting calories on processed carbohydrates and sugar. High-fibre carbs such as wholemeal bread, jacket potatoes, brown rice, and fresh fruit and vegetables will help keep your energy and blood sugar steady, so you don’t get drowsy after lunch. Make small changes to improve your diet. Swap crisps for popcorn, a sugary drink for a bottle of water, white bread for wholemeal.

**- Boost your physical activity.** You may not have time to do serious exercise at work but taking regular breaks to walk about, stretch or do some push ups and squats against the side of the vehicle will help a lot. Sitting for long periods is very damaging to our health, so take a break as often as you can and move about.

**- Sleep enough. Aim for seven to nine hours of good-quality sleep.** Sleep is the time when the body is repaired and the brain washed free of toxins. Getting too little sleep is damaging for the body and the brain and also makes you far more likely to be drowsy or make unsafe driving decisions.

**- Remember that knowingly driving when you aren’t well enough to do so is an offence**, which can lead to a charge of dangerous driving.

Making sure that you are as roadworthy as your vehicle will make you a safer driver. It’s also an investment in your quality of life and your future. Your health and your safety are the most important assets you have. Protect them both and, by being healthier and safer, you will also help to protect those you share the road with.