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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY GUIDE

DRIVING DECISIONS

An occupational therapy guide to
driving assessments in NSW.

*Information for clients, families and
referrers in New South Wales*

Sarah Smith Occupational Therapy

A plain-language guide to what occupational
therapy driving assessments can involve,
what they can help answer, and what
may happen next.



What this guide is for

*Driving can support independence, work, study, family life and community access -
but it is also a complex daily task.*

An occupational therapy driving assessment looks at the skills that support safe driving, not just whether someone can operate a car. It considers the person, their health or disability, their everyday goals and the environments they need to access.

This booklet is designed for clients, families, support teams and referrers who want a clear overview of what usually happens before, during and after an OT driving assessment.



Driving is more than operating a car

Driving uses many skills at once, including movement, vision, attention, problem-solving, judgement, emotional regulation and road-rule understanding.



Physical skills



Vision



Thinking skills



Self-monitoring



When an assessment may be helpful

- A person wants to start, resume or continue driving.
- There are concerns about attention, vision, processing speed, coordination, behaviour or safety.
- A health condition, injury, disability or medication may affect driving.
- The person or team needs a structured clinical opinion before driving lessons or licence steps.
- In NSW, the licensing authority may request an assessment based on advice from the person's treating medical professional.



Important Note

Sarah Smith Occupational Therapy completes OT driving assessments in NSW only. This guide is written from that perspective. Processes, forms and licensing requirements can vary between states and territories, so people outside NSW should check the requirements for their own licensing authority.

At a glance: the assessment process

1

Referral +
paperwork

2

Off-road clinical
assessment

3

On-road assessment
if appropriate

4

Report +
recommendations

Driving and your responsibilities in NSW



Your responsibility to notify Transport for NSW

In NSW, drivers and riders are responsible for notifying Transport for NSW if they have a medical condition, disability, recent surgery or change in health that may affect their ability to drive or ride safely. This responsibility applies when the condition occurs, not only when a licence is due for renewal.



Licence decisions

Transport for NSW makes decisions about licence status. Doctors, specialists, optometrists, occupational therapists and other health professionals provide information and recommendations to support that decision-making process.



Before the assessment

Before an occupational therapy driving assessment can proceed, you may need medical clearance confirming that you are medically fit to undertake a driving assessment. Depending on your situation, you may also need information from your GP, specialist, optometrist, ophthalmologist or other treating professionals.



You may need

Medical clearance confirming that you are medically fit to undertake a driving assessment.



Bring with you



Your current licence or learner licence



Any glasses or contact lenses you use for driving



Hearing aids if required



Details of relevant medical conditions or medications



Any correspondence from Transport for NSW or your referring health professional

What happens during the assessment



The off-road assessment

The off-road part of the assessment usually involves an interview and clinical screening. This may include discussion of your medical and driving history, current driving needs, vision, physical abilities, thinking skills, judgement, insight, reaction time, road-rule knowledge, vehicle access, equipment needs and any concerns raised by you, your family, your doctor or Transport for NSW.



Medical and driving history



Vision



Physical abilities



Thinking skills



Judgement and insight



Reaction time



Road-rule knowledge



Vehicle access



Equipment needs



Concerns raised by others



The on-road assessment

The on-road component allows the occupational therapist to observe real driving performance. It is usually completed in a dual-control vehicle with a qualified driving instructor present. The occupational therapist observes and records information about how you manage the driving task, including vehicle control, observation, speed choice, lane positioning, gap selection, decision-making, hazard response and ability to follow instructions.



Vehicle control



Observation



Speed choice



Lane positioning



Gap selection



Decision-making



Hazard response



Ability to follow instructions



Vehicle modifications or adaptive equipment

If vehicle modifications or adaptive equipment are required, the assessment may consider whether these are suitable and whether further training is needed before a recommendation can be made.



Possible recommendations after assessment



Continue driving

You are able to continue driving without additional recommendations.



Drive with licence conditions

You are able to drive with licence conditions, such as automatic transmission only, use of vehicle modifications, distance limits, area limits or other conditions considered appropriate.



Driving lessons or rehabilitation

You would benefit from driving lessons, rehabilitation or further practice before a final recommendation is made.



Vehicle modifications or adaptive equipment

You require vehicle modifications or adaptive equipment and training before driving independently.



Reassessment recommended

A reassessment is recommended after recovery, rehabilitation, further medical review or a period of skill development.



Driving not recommended at this time

Driving is not recommended at this time because the identified risks cannot be managed safely.



Reporting and licence decisions

Following the assessment, the occupational therapist prepares a report.

This may be provided to the referring doctor, relevant health professionals and Transport for NSW, depending on the referral pathway and reporting requirements.

The occupational therapist provides recommendations, but Transport for NSW is responsible for making final decisions about licence status, restrictions or conditions.



Assessment completed



Report prepared



Report shared (as required)



Transport for NSW makes the final decision



Transport for NSW is responsible for final decisions about your licence status, restrictions or conditions.



If driving is not currently recommended

If driving is not recommended, this can be a significant adjustment.

The focus should be on maintaining community access, participation, routines, work, study, appointments and social connection wherever possible.



Support



Transport options



Services



Stay connected



Family or friend support



Public transport



Community transport



Taxi subsidy schemes



Rideshare services



Home delivery



Telehealth appointments and local service planning



Support to develop alternative travel routines



Resources and references

Scan the QR code to access the online resource page
and reference download for this guide.



www.ssoccupationaltherapy.com/ot-driving-assessment



Website

www.ssoccupationaltherapy.com

For the latest links, resources and
driving assessment information.



Supporting safe driving decisions



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