Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

Mike Glynn, 10th IBE Epilepsy & Society Conference - Copenhagen
5th August 2006
Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

• There are few aspects of having epilepsy in adult life that cause greater distress than the necessary legal restrictions on driving.  
  Hopkins, A. Appleton, R 1996 ‘Epilepsy The Facts

• Coping with modern life without the motor car is too much for many and not surprisingly some with uncontrolled epilepsy continue to drive and undoubtedly many accidents ensue. 
  Taylor, MP 1996 Managing Epilepsy in Primary Care

• This (Driving) is undoubtedly one of the most emotionally charged issues for individuals with epilepsy. Until relatively recently most countries had extremely onerous restrictions on individuals with seizures. Some even took away driving privileges for life. 
  Berg, A 2004 IBE Commission on Epilepsy, Risks and Insurability
Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

- **EUCARE Action Plan**

**Campaign to change driving regulations**

Brainwave, The Irish Epilepsy Association

**Outcome**

New regulations including the 1-year seizure-free period came into effect on the 26th November 1999. A new Irish Government in 2002 gave driving regulation responsibility to the Department of Transport. Brainwave is continuing to lobby for a review regarding:

- Nocturnal seizures
- Changes of medication; provoked and unprovoke seizures
- Non-epileptic seizures or situations in which diagnosis is uncertain
- Single seizures; provoked or unprovoked
- Simple partial seizures where awareness is retained
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Changes in Ireland

Extract from the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) (Amendment) Regulations 2004

(2) in the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category who suffers, or has suffered in the past, from epilepsy, fitness to drive—

(a) may be certified for a limited period in relation to vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, where the applicant—

• has not suffered any epileptic attack during the 12 month period preceding the date of medical examination,

• has only had nocturnal seizures over a period of 2 years preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist,

• has only had a single provoked seizure and such seizure was prior to the 6 month period preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist,

or

• has only had simple partial seizures where awareness is fully maintained at all times, and certification is by a consultant neurologist
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- has only had nocturnal seizures over a period of 2 years preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist,
- has only had a single provoked seizure and such seizure was prior to the 6 month period preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist, or
- has only had simple partial seizures where awareness is fully maintained at all times, and certification is by a consultant neurologist.
Dear Doctor

I'm on epilepsy tablets since I was a child and haven't had an attack for five years. Is it okay to stay on the treatment? I have a good job and need to drive every day. I prefer to stay on the medicine rather than take a risk. Are there any medical problems from staying on the tablets? I'm on Epilim.

The general rule about epilepsy is that treatment may be discontinued slowly if there are no attacks for two years and no evidence (on EEG) of worsening of the condition.

In practice many patients with epilepsy prefer to stay on their treatment because it lessens their risk of attacks, and thus allows them to stay driving. Those who are free of attacks for three years are allowed legally to drive.

The issue of driving can be the deciding issue. If you cannot afford to take the chance then staying on treatment is perfectly sensible. There are no medical issues from long-term use, other than the usual surveillance. Epilim is a very safe drug for those it suits. I know some patients who are on it for ten or 20 years, all without problems.
Assessment of Fitness to Drive in Epilepsy in Europe 1996

International Bureau for Epilepsy
Recommended European Regulations

Group 1 Licenses (Private car, motor)

FIRST SEIZURE
- no neurological disorder: 3-6 months driving ban
- neurological disorder: individual assessment, at least 6 months

EPILEPSY
(more than 1 seizure, more than 24 hours apart)
1 year driving ban

Exceptions
- in last year, seizures only during sleep: no ban, but licence of limited duration (for example 1 year)
- sporadic seizures: assessment as in case of first seizure
  (interval of more than 2 years)
- progressive neurological disorder: individual assessment, at least 1 year driving ban
Recommended European Regulations cont.....

CHANGE OF MEDICATION

- Change of medication
- Recurrence in the course of seizure withdrawal or change of medication

Withdrawal

After less than 3 years seizure-freedom driving ban during withdrawal plus 3 months

After 3 or more years seizure-freedom no driving ban during withdrawal or thereafter

Epilepsy and Driving in Europe
Epilepsy and Driving in Europe
Schmedding et al Recommendations
Group 1

• 1st Seizure
• Epilepsy
• Provoked seizure
• Sleep seizures
• Other seizures without influence on driving ability
• Other loss of consciousness
• Seizure because of change of medication

• 6 months
• 12 months
• Varies
• 12 months + no other seizures
• Varies
• 3 mo
Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

Questionnaire Respondents

Belgium
Croatia
Czech Rep.
France
Germany
Ireland
Israel
Malta
Portugal
Sweden
Switzerland
UK
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# Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

## Group 2

### Epilepsy - Seizure Free Period in Years

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### Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

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Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

Epilepsy and Driving Licence in Lithuania
Mameniskiene R 1, Jatuzis D 1, Budrys V 1
1 Vilnius University Hospital, Vilnius, Lithuania

Purpose: In Lithuania driving is prohibited by law for patients with a current diagnosis or history of epilepsy despite analysis and to compare the view of doctors and patients with epilepsy into the legalisation of driving in appropriate

Method: 260 patients with epilepsy were given a questionnaire regarding epilepsy characteristics, social issues and quality of life. 156 neurologists completed a questionnaire regarding legal permission to get a driver’s license for patients.

Results: 64.2% of patients indicated that driving restrictions have a negative impact on their quality of life. 28.1% hold a driver’s license. 73.1% would support legal permission to drive for seizure-free patients. 94.5% of neurologists clearly defined subgroup of epilepsy patients. 87.8% of them would permit the patient to drive if seizure-free without antiepileptic drug. 19.8% would allow the patient to drive if seizures occur only during night sleep and 14.4% if seizures driving after a 5 year seizure-free period, 43.2% after 2 years. 26.7% would not withhold a driving license after the in the assessment of driving fitness.

Conclusion: Most epilepsy patients and neurologists support legal permission to drive for seizure-free patients. Results of the ongoing revision of regulations of driving licensing in Lithuania towards liberalisation according to EU directives.
Epilepsy and Driving in Europe

http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/home/drivinglicence/index_en.htm

DRIVE ON!
You are driving your car, Are you allowed to stay behind this bike?

Centraal Bureau Rijvaardigheidsbewijzen

✅ YES ✖️ NO