You may have noticed that the label on your painkiller medication says: ‘May cause drowsiness. If affected do not drive or operate machinery. Avoid alcoholic drink.’

If you are someone who drives, you may be wondering if it is safe for you to continue whilst on strong medication. The information in this leaflet will help you to decide.

**How painkillers affect people**
Strong painkillers affect each person in a different way. Strong painkillers make some people drowsy and their reactions can be slower than usual. This may be worse if you take other medicines that cause drowsiness or if you drink alcohol.

Strong painkillers commonly prescribed by doctors include: Oramorph, MST, Oxynorm, Fentanyl and Oxycontin.

**Advice on driving whilst taking strong painkillers**
- You should not drive for five days after starting or changing the dose of your strong painkiller. Sometimes longer is needed.
- You must not drive if you feel sleepy.
- You must not drive after drinking alcohol or taking strong drugs which have not been prescribed or recommended by your doctors, e.g. cannabis
- You must not drive if you start taking other drugs that cause sleepiness, either prescribed by your doctor or bought from the chemist, e.g. hayfever medicine.
- You must not drive on days where you have had to take extra (breakthrough or rescue) doses of a strong painkiller, e.g. Oramorph.

**Restarting driving**
If after five days you are not drowsy, you may start driving. However, make your first trip:
- short
- on roads that you are familiar with
- at a time when the traffic is not too busy
- with an experienced driver to accompany you, if you feel this would be helpful

**Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)**
You do not need to inform the DVLA that you are starting a strong painkiller. However, there may be other information about your illness that the DVLA needs to know. Your doctors or the DVLA will advise you about this.

**How to contact the DVLA**
To tell the DVLA about a medical condition call 0870 600 0301 Monday-Friday 8.00am-5.30pm, Saturday 8.00am-1.00pm.
Please remember to quote your full name, date of birth and/ or driver number (if known).
Alternatively, write to:
Drivers Medical Group
DVLA
Swansea
SA99 1TU

You can also fax them on 0845 850 0095 email eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk or visit www.dvla.gov.uk

**Car insurance**

You may need to inform your motor insurance company about your current state of health and what medication you are taking.

Each insurance company is different, so it is best to discuss your circumstances with yours to be sure that you are covered.

A member of the specialist palliative care team or your GP will be happy to help you decide when it is safe to drive.

These guidelines were originally produced by palliative care teams in South Wales with the assistance of Heather Major, senior medical advisor to the DVLA.
They are reproduced by kind permission of Dr Nicola Pease, Velindre Hospital, Cardiff.

**References**

