

## DRIVING WITH SCIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a psychiatric disorder that can affect all areas of daily life including one's ability to drive. The natural course of the disorder often leads to disintegration of sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial abilities. Symptoms of schizophrenia like delusions, distorted influential thinking and perception, hallucinations and disorganized behavior or responses to medications and their side effects can all affect one's ability to safely operate a vehicle.

### Medication Issues:

It is important to seek a physician's input regarding side-effects, which may impair driving performance, vision, perception, attention, reaction time, and sensorimotor performance areas. For example, sedation is a common side effect from antipsychotic medications, which can produce feelings of sleepiness, greatly interfering with the safety of driving.

### Sensorimotor and Perceptual Issues:

It is essential to be aware of any difficulties such as interpreting things around you (ex. traffic signals, pedestrians, and emergency sirens), any irregularities in eye movements, or problems with orientation to space and the environment around you, (ex. maintaining the position of the vehicle in your lane of traffic or being able to stop at appropriate distances).

### Cognitive and Psychological Issues:

Many times person's with schizophrenia have difficulty with inferential and abstract thinking tasks, find it hard to maintain attention for a given length of time, have poor decision-making and reasoning skills and/or may have emotional disturbances. Since driving safely requires the ability to do all of these, it is critical to be aware of one's strengths and limited capabilities in these areas when considering operating a vehicle.

### **Common factors that can affect safe driving:**

- Impaired judgment in complex situations (ex. high traffic areas)
- Difficulty interpreting traffic situations and predicting changes
- Slow processing and reaction time
- Trouble visually scanning or tracking quickly
- Easily frustrated or confused
- Visual impairments (poor acuity)

A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide a comprehensive evaluation and make recommendations regarding driving. The goal is independent, safe driving.

### **The assessment should include:**

- Review of medical history and medications
- Functional ability
- Vision
- Perception
- Reaction time
- Behind-the-wheel evaluation