

WHY YOUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT *By Alan Fleming*

Many of you will go through your careers as licensed cab drivers without any health problems. But there are those who are less fortunate and when it happens they are at a loss as what to do. The biggest problems we face as we advance in years are the heart and our sight. These medical conditions will most certainly stop you from driving as a group 2 driver. The DVLA guidelines are strictly adhered to by the PCO in respect of heart attack, strokes, and visual acuity. If you have suffered a heart attack you will have to pass what is known as the Bruce Protocol. This is where you have to complete 9 minutes of walking on a walking machine. This is not one of those machines you will find in a keep fit club, although similar there is a difference. First you are wired up to a monitor and are told to get on the machine which is known as, a treadmill. You walk for three minutes on the flat and then the walking part elevates to a steeper slope and speeds up. After that, the slope gets much steeper and faster. All the time your heart is being monitored to see if it is under stress. If at any time this happens the machine is switched off, and you fail the test.

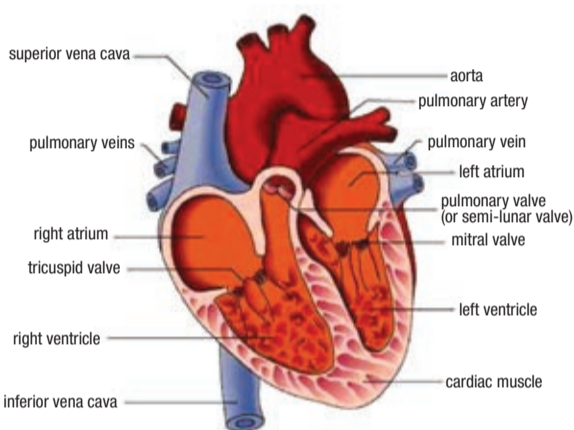


Diagram of the human heart

However your having failed the test may not be down to a defective heart but some other reason, unfortunately it is up to the individual driver to prove it. Some reasons for failing can be due to the fact that you are not fit. One of the biggest problems is being overweight as it

puts an enormous strain on the heart. There is another acceptable test to deduce if you have a heart problem. But unless your GP refers you to a cardiologist the test will be costly, currently about £700. The test is known as a Myocardial Perfusion Test, this is where a coloured liquid is injected into the bloodstream. This will show if there is any heart damage or defect. What you have to hope for here is how the left Ventricular functions this is the chamber which is most important. It is this chamber that pumps the blood from the heart around the body. You can see this in the diagram above. What the PCO will be looking for on the report is that the Ventricular is operating at an efficiency of 40% or above. If this is the case then you will be fit to drive on a group 2 license. If the result of your test shows less than 40% this is an indication that you have a problem.

What happens over the years is that the coronary arteries start to fur up and reduce the blood flow to the heart muscle. You can see the heart muscle at the base of the heart in the diagram. This is known as Myocardial Ischaemia or Ischemic heart disease. The causes of this are smoking

and high cholesterol which is a build up of fatty deposits in the coronary arteries, known as plaque. There are drugs that can help to reduce the cholesterol to help stop the further build up of plaque, these drugs are known as Statins. If the problem is really advanced the cardiologist may recommend angioplasty. This procedure involves inserting a catheter into the artery in the groin and threading it round into the coronary arteries. A balloon is then opened and widens the artery to allow better blood flow. This can also be done by inserting stents which are titanium tubes. After a period of time probably six months you will have to take the stress test once more, hopefully you will pass. Then you can apply for your license to be returned. There is one drawback to this procedure, it is recommended the procedure be performed every three years. However, I am only a layman on this subject and you should consult with your GP.

Visual Acuity

Most drivers will know that if your vision is 6/6 in each eye then you have perfect vision. However, problems do arise especially as you get older. For group 2 drivers such as taxi drivers the regulations laid down by the DVLA are quite strict. If you start to experience a diminishing field of vision then you should make for an Ophthalmic Optician. If after taking the Snellens eye test that is the letters chart on the wall your vision is worse than 6/9 in the better eye and more than 6/18 in the worse eye, you will need glasses. The older drivers among us may find that they have a visual sight worse than that. However, they have what is known as grandfather rights. This comes under the Motor Vehicles Driving Licenses Regulations 1996.

Drivers who were issued a group 2 licence before January 1983 would have to have a visual acuity as follows. They would need the better eye to be no more than 6/12 and the worse eye no more than 6/36 with glasses if necessary. This is what is known as grandfather rights. For group 2 drivers whose licence was issued on 1st March 1992 the standard applicable would have to be at least 6/9 in the better eye. And at least 6/12 in the worse eye with glasses if necessary. This also applies to group 2 drivers whose licence was issued on 31 December 1996 and on or after 1st January 1997. As I have said previously I am not an expert therefore you should always consult with an Ophthalmic Optician.

So don't forget your health is most important to your continued career as a cab driver here in London. Over the many years that I have been a cab driver I have learnt quite a lot, especially hackney carriage law. I have now started to learn about the medical problems that you may encounter, in the future. Therefore with the aid of a friend we started Taxi Drivers & Owners Legal Protection Ltd. So if you are looking for the best legal representation in the trade perhaps you may consider joining our new legal insurance scheme, which is run by me and Dave Cohen. Dave can be contacted on 07956 894 701, I can be contacted on 07831 092 123. So good luck to you all and good hunting.

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