

# fact sheet

Austin, TX 78701 Mobile Clinic 512-689-0236 safedrivingrehab.com



## Visually Impaired Drivers

### Referral Considerations & State Restrictions

Appropriate referrals to an OT-DRS from a vision specialist, physician or other concerned caregiver include any visual impairment that meets state safety mandates and Medical Advisory Board guidelines for minimum driving requirements. It's important to remember that with any medical status change which could affect ability to drive, including any sort of visual change, the person is responsible for promptly informing the Department of Public Safety (DPS). They will provide information on required road safety testing which might include a new vision/road test or a comprehensive driver evaluation. This type of specialty medical assessment is performed by an Occupational Therapy- Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.

Conditions related to visual impairments commonly seen by OT-DRS's for driver safety include:

- Macular Degeneration
- Glaucoma and Cataracts
- Diabetic Retinopathy
- Traumatic Brain Injury, CVA or Stroke
- Retinal Detachment or Neoplasms
- Albinism or Other Congenital Deficit
- Autism, ADHD, LD or Related Disorders
- Developmental (Visual System) Delay

Additional driving risks can come from:

- Age-related visual changes
- Acquired Visual sensitivities
- Vision Field Deficits, Inattention/Neglect
- Color Blindness
- Worsening Night Vision & Contrast Sensitivity
- Tunnel Vision or Reduced Peripheral Vision
- Impaired or Lost Depth Perception
- Visually-based Nystagmus or headaches

In Texas, drivers without prescribed lenses must have at least 20/40 vision in both eyes on their DPS vision test in order to drive personal vehicles without any restrictions. Lens wearers must have 20/50 in the better eye or with both eyes together and will receive Restriction Code A: on the driver's license for

"corrective lenses". For any visual impairment, one must have a statement from a vision specialist saying that vision cannot be improved or repaired and follow up with regular testing and advised treatment. Anyone with visual acuity falling 20/60 to 20/70 will face additional driving restrictions. Several state mandated driving restrictions exist and drivers are required to follow them. Restriction C on a license means "daytime only". Restriction D means "not to exceed 45 mph" and E means "no expressway driving". Additional license restrictions exist for various other factors such as the requirement to use bioptic telescopic lenses, not driving on busy roadways or during other risky conditions. These "P" restrictions (or "other") are per medical professional recommendations should be clearly stated on the back of the license. Other safety requirements exist such as automatic transmission "T", applicable vehicle devices "V", power steering "W", and so on. Each category restriction has its own set of conditions for removal and you will need to contact the DPS for appropriate steps. Lastly, even though there may not be a license restriction present, it's important to be aware of visual limitations which may reduce safety on the road. Obviously, always drive defensively and do not drink and drive, but also remember to avoid driving under undue emotional stress or fatigue. Also, make sure you are aware of any prescription medication side effects that could impair driving. This is one important area that often gets overlooked.

For more information on driving with visual impairments or to sensitively discuss a possible referral, please contact [missy@safedrivingrehab.com](mailto:missy@safedrivingrehab.com) or call 512-689-0236. Missy Bell, OT-DRS, has over 25 years working with diverse populations and holds the highest level badges in Driving by AOTA. She has taken several additional OT-DRS courses on vision and driving and holds enough hours to sit for the CDRS exam. Missy started a private practice driving rehab clinic in 2013 and is employed by St. David's for driving rehabilitation needs. She also instructs regular drivers ed (in vehicle).