Driving Phobia is quite common but can be triggered or compounded by experience of road trauma – whether you were involved, witnessed it, or someone you know has been involved. It can extend to being a passenger in any vehicle. This fact sheet describes what is involved and some strategies which may assist you to cope with driving phobia.

Quick Facts
Driving phobias are actually common but can cause serious problems, especially for people who need to get to work by car, drive for a living or live in areas with poor access to public transport.

The incidence of driving phobia is higher in women than men and the average age of onset is in the 30’s to 40’s.

Driving phobia often occurs at the same time as other conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), depression, chronic pain and drug or alcohol abuse.

What is Driving Phobia?
Driving phobia is an overwhelming fear of driving which often starts after a road trauma, but may begin in other ways.

Being anxious in potentially dangerous situations is normal and helps our bodies get ready to deal with the situation. People often get anxious when they are stressed.

It is also normal to be a bit frightened of driving after being in, or witnessing a road trauma. However, because we tend to avoid the things we fear, the fear can worsen very rapidly and become a phobia[1].

Symptoms
- Avoidance of driving completely or to particular places, finding excuses to not drive or arguing with people who want you to drive.
- Going a much longer route to avoid certain roads, even if this is very inconvenient.
- Physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, racing heartbeat, tingling lips, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, dry mouth and throat, feeling faint, wobbly legs.
- Feeling that things are not real or are not where they should be. For example, you may feel that someone else is driving or that you are on “automatic pilot.”
- Thoughts about swerving across the road into the path of another vehicle - with feelings you can’t stop yourself from doing so.[7]
- Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts if you have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Helpful Tips
Talk, talk, talk
Talking about your fears is an important way for your brain to process fear. Being afraid when you feel threatened or when something is dangerous is completely normal. It is okay to admit that you don’t feel safe or comfortable driving, rather than struggle
alone when feeling scared or stressed and not telling others about your fear. It is also a good way to get help and support.

Talk to friends and family. Talk when you feel like it. However, remember that it is not good or helpful to force someone to talk about their fears if they are not ready.

Thinking style

After a stressful event or experience our thinking can become unhelpful and stuck. We may tell ourselves: “I can’t cope”, when the reality is you may be able to cope, but it feels unpleasant.

We might get caught in ‘black and white thinking’- that is thinking in extremes. Rather than thinking “driving is dangerous” think “driving is sometimes risky”.

What you think influences how you feel. Thinking that: “driving is dangerous”, may be true, but doesn’t help a fear of driving. Look at what you say to yourself about driving and work out some statements which counter them. For example: “Although driving is risky at times, I’m a careful driver and I don’t take unnecessary risks.”

Tiny steps

When we avoid what we fear, we never learn that something is not as dangerous as we think and we can cope with it. One way to deal with this is to try gradually exposing yourself to driving in tiny steps. Reward yourself along the way. You can work out the steps you can cope with yourself. This is an example:

- Sit in the car with a friend or family member to support you.
- Just sit in the car by yourself.
- Sit in the car with the engine running.
- Drive a short distance up the road, park the car and walk back.
- Drive round the block.
- Take a slightly longer trip with a friend to support you.
- Take the same trip without the friend
- Take a slightly longer trip.
- Keep extending the length of the trip until you feel comfortable
- Take a trip on a road that you are not familiar with
- Stay with each step until your anxiety has reduced by at least 50%.

Affirmations

Positive self-talk while you are driving can be a useful method of dealing with fear of driving that is not too extreme. For example try saying to yourself:

- “Driving is an everyday activity. I am a careful driver.”
- “If I miss the turn, I can take the next one and come back.”

Relaxation

Learn some relaxation techniques and practise these each time before you drive, then if you notice that you are getting tense while you are driving - deliberately relax. Keep practising until it becomes automatic. There are some good relaxation CDs, Apps and MP3’s available in shops or online.

For example: at Healthline http://tinyurl.com/pnk5pj5 and UCLA free guided health meditations at http://tinyurl.com/yzjav76.

Therapy

If your fear of driving continues to compromise your convenience and lifestyle, you may want to seek help from a counsellor or psychologist such as that offered by Road Trauma Support WA.

Getting Treatment

Types of treatment

Effective types of treatment include:

- Behaviour therapies such as progressive desensitisation, exposure therapy (Craske and Mystkowski 2006; and virtual therapy (Parsons and Rizzo 2008).
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) including trauma-based CBT
- Hypnosis
- Medication (see your General Practitioner).
Each year over 38,000 West Australians are affected by road trauma

We provide support

About Us
Issues experienced from death or serious injury from road trauma are often complex because of the sudden nature of the incident and severity of impact. It makes no difference what your role is, or how you were involved - you might not even know the person but you may still feel the effects of road trauma.

USEFUL RESOURCES

**Lifeline**
phone: 13 11 14
web: www.lifeline.org.au

**Kids Help Line**
phone: 1800 55 1800

**Rural Link**
phone: 1800 552 002

Monday to Friday
24 hours: Saturday, Sunday & public holidays

**BeyondBlue**
phone: 1300 22 4636
web: www.beyondblue.org.au

**Crisis Care**
phone: 9223 1111 / 1800 199 008

**Translating and Interpreting Service**
phone: 13 14 50

**Act Belong Commit**
A community based promotion campaign that encourages people to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing
web: www.actbelongcommit.org.au
phone: 9266 1709

Road Trauma Support WA is delivered by the Injury Control Council of WA and funded by the WA Road Trauma Trust Account, offering:

- Information
- Peer support
- Specialised counselling, and
- Prevention education.

Information, support and counselling are available free to anyone impacted by road trauma, regardless of when the incident occurred or what involvement (direct or indirect) the person had.

We are committed to being respectful of cultural and family values and provide our service in a safe, non-judgemental environment.

To find out more, please visit our website or contact us.