

Driving and epilepsy



Epilepsy Action – together we can change lives

Together we can help more people gain the knowledge and confidence to live better with epilepsy. We can raise awareness, so that more people understand epilepsy.

Together we can:

- Provide expert information and advice, so everyone affected by epilepsy can get the support they need to live better with epilepsy
- Run local events and support groups, so that fewer people have to face epilepsy alone
- Campaign to help make sure health services and national policies take into account the needs of everyone living with epilepsy

It's only your support that can make this life-changing work possible.

Please donate today.

You can call the Epilepsy Action fundraising team on 0113 210 8851 or donate online at **epilepsy.org.uk/donate**
You can also stay up-to-date with all the latest epilepsy news and information by joining Epilepsy Action. Membership starts from just £1 a month - join today by calling 0113 210 8800 or sign up online at **epilepsy.org.uk/join**

Thank you.

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Introduction

If you have epilepsy, and want to know if you can drive, this booklet is for you.

The law says that if you hold a driving licence, or want to start driving for the first time, you must tell the driving agency about your epilepsy. Some people believe that if you have epilepsy, you will never be allowed to hold a driving licence. But for many people with epilepsy this isn't true.

You may be able to hold a driving licence, depending on:

- The number of seizures you've had
- The type of seizures you have
- Whether your seizures happen when you're awake or asleep
- When your last seizure happened
- The type of vehicle you want to drive

Read on to find out how the epilepsy driving rules apply to you.



Stopping driving and telling the driving agency

You need to tell the driving agency if you've had a seizure or been diagnosed with epilepsy. This is a legal requirement.

In most cases, you'll need to stop driving and give up your licence. You can get your licence back in the future if you meet the medical standards for driving. How long you'll need to stop driving for depends on your epilepsy and the type of licence you hold.

Do I have to stop driving?

If you have a seizure of any kind, you must stop driving and tell the driving agency. If you don't:

- You could be fined up to £1,000
- You could have a seizure while driving. This could put you and others in danger, and you could be prosecuted
- Your car insurance is unlikely to cover you
- Your doctor could report you to the driving agency and your licence will be revoked. Doctors can break confidentiality if they think you are putting yourself or others at risk.

Exception to this rule:

The only exception to this rule is for people who have already been given permission to drive with their type of seizures. For this to apply, the driving agency must already know about your seizures, and have given you permission to drive while having them. Find out more about this on pages 14-15.

How do I tell the driving agency?

You can tell the driving agency about your epilepsy by surrendering your licence. The driving agencies say you should surrender your driving licence if any of these things apply to you:

- Your doctor tells you to stop driving for 3 months or more
- Your medical condition affects your ability to drive safely and lasts for 3 months or more
- You do not meet the required standards for driving because of your medical condition

Surrendering your licence is not permanent. If you meet the [rules for driving] in the future, you can apply to get it back.

How to surrender your licence

Licences issued by DVLA (England, Scotland and Wales):

- Take a note of your driving licence number (or take a photo or photocopy). This will help if you reapply in the future
- Fill in the form *Declaration of surrender for medical reasons* (for car and motorbike licences) or form *VCERT* (for bus and lorry licences). You can download the forms from the DVLA website or call them to request a copy
- Send the form to the DVLA along with your driving licence

Licences issued by DVA (Northern Ireland)

- Take a note of the driving licence number (or take a photo or photocopy). This will help if you reapply in the future

- Send both parts of your licence, with a letter explaining why you are surrendering it, to the DVA. See page 28 for the address

Important: you don't need to fill in other forms

When you surrender your licence, you don't need to do anything else or fill in any other forms until you are ready to reapply.

Be aware that the DVLA website gives you the option to tell them about your epilepsy by filling in an online form, or sending them a form called an *FEPI* in the post.

If you fill in the online form (or send them the *FEPI*) at a time when you don't meet the standards for driving, your licence will be revoked (taken away). See below for why this matters.

What's the difference between surrendering my licence and having it revoked?

Surrendering your licence means you send it to the driving agency voluntarily (without being asked). If your licence is revoked, it means the driving agency has told you to give up your licence.

The big benefit to surrendering your licence is that you may be able to start driving again as soon as you meet the medical standards for driving, even if you haven't got your licence back. See our information about reapplying for your licence on page 20 for more details.

If your licence is revoked, when you reapply for your licence you won't be allowed to drive again until:

- The driving agency has completed their medical enquiries, and
- You've got your licence back in the post

This can take weeks or months, depending on how busy the driving agency is and how long the medical enquiries take.

When can I get my licence back?

Most people with epilepsy need to be seizure free for 12 months to hold a standard car driving licence. But there are different rules depending on what type of seizures you have, and when they happen. There are also stricter rules for driving heavier vehicles like buses and lorries.

See our information about the driving rules on page 13 to find out when you may be able to drive again.

Other ways to tell the driving agency

If you think you meet the medical standards for driving, you might choose to tell the driving agency about your seizures without surrendering your licence. The driving agency will decide if you can keep your driving licence, or if they will revoke it. You must not drive until the driving agency has told you their decision.

If you're not sure if you meet the medical standards, speak to your doctor for advice. The Epilepsy Action Helpline can also help explain the rules.

Licences issued by the DVLA (England, Scotland and Wales)

If you choose not to surrender your licence, you have 2 options for telling the DVLA about your seizures:

- Fill in their online form at gov.uk/epilepsy-and-driving (not available for bus, coach and lorry drivers, or people who've had a single seizure), **or**
- Send them medical questionnaire form *FEPI* (car and motorcycle licences) or *FEPIV* (bus, coach or lorry drivers)

Licences issued by the DVA (Northern Ireland)

If you choose not to surrender your licence, you can report your seizures to DVA by phone on 0300 200 7861 or emailing them at dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk. They will then send you a medical questionnaire to complete.

Do I need to tell my insurer?

You need to have a valid driving licence for most insurance policies, so you must tell your insurer that you've had to stop driving. If you don't, your insurance may not cover you if you make a claim.

If you keep a car on the road, you must have insurance for it, but this can be difficult without a driving licence. You may be able to put your insurance into someone else's name, for example a friend or family member. Check with your insurance provider if this is an option.

If you are able to keep your car off the road (for example in a garage), you can register it as off the road. This is sometimes called a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN). You don't have to insure vehicles that are registered off the road. But you may still want to insure it against damage or theft. Some companies sell insurance for this, called SORN or 'laid up' insurance.



Help for when you can't drive

We know that for a lot of people, having to stop driving is one of the hardest parts of getting an epilepsy diagnosis. Support is available to help you get around without a car, and to help you at work.

Free or reduced bus and train travel

If you've had to stop driving because of your epilepsy, you are entitled to a disabled persons bus pass to get you free bus travel (in England, Scotland and Wales) or reduced price travel (in Northern Ireland). Contact your local council or transport authority to apply.

You can also get a Disabled Person's Railcard. This gets you a third off the price of rail fares in England, Scotland and Wales. Ask at a train station or visit disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk for details.

Help with travel costs to work

The Access to Work scheme may help to pay for taxi fares to and from work if you can't use public transport. Contact our helpline or visit these websites for details:

England, Scotland and Wales: gov.uk/access-to-work

Northern Ireland: nidirect.gov.uk/access-to-work

Changes at work

Most people with epilepsy are classed as disabled under the equality laws. This means employers have a legal duty to make changes at work if you need them to help you do your job. This is called making reasonable adjustments.

If you're not allowed to drive, reasonable adjustments that might help include:

- Letting you start work at a time that allows you to get the bus
- Moving you to office-based duties that don't involve driving
- Teaming you up with someone who can drive
- Letting you work from home, or at an office that's easier to get to by public transport

Talk to your employer about any changes you might need. Our employer toolkit can help with this conversation. Visit employers.epilepsy.org.uk



Driving rules for car and motorbike licences

You must tell the driving agency about your seizures. If you've not done this yet, see page 6 for information about how to tell them.

The rules for when you can drive with epilepsy depend on the type of seizures you have. You also need to follow your doctor's advice about your treatment and check-ups for your epilepsy.

Seizures that happen while you're awake, and affect your consciousness

If you have seizures that affect your consciousness, you must be seizure free for at least 12 months, before you're allowed to drive.

These are a few examples of seizures that affect your consciousness:

- Tonic-clonic seizures
- Focal impaired awareness seizures (used to be called complex partial)
- Absence seizures

I've had a one-off (breakthrough) seizure after being seizure free

If you've got your licence on the basis of being seizure free, and then have a seizure, you must stop driving and surrender your licence.

You will usually need to be seizure free for 12 months before you can start driving again. However, if your seizure happened because of your doctor advising you to change or stop your medicine, you might be able to start driving again sooner than this. See page 16 for more details.

Seizures that happen in your sleep

If your seizures always start when you're asleep, you might be allowed to drive even if you continue having them. They don't need to be at night. A seizure that starts during a daytime nap also counts as a sleep seizure.

The driving agency may allow you to drive without being seizure free if:

- You've been having sleep seizures for at least 12 months, and you've never had awake seizures, **or**
- You've had awake seizures in the past, but have only been having sleep seizures for at least 3 years

Seizures that don't affect your consciousness

If your seizures never affect your consciousness, the driving agency may allow you to drive without being seizure free. This is as long as you:

- Stay fully conscious and aware of what's happening around you during your seizures
- Are able to move and don't lose control of your movements during your seizures

- Have been having this type seizure for at least 12 months
- Have never had any other type of epileptic seizure

If you've ever had an epileptic seizure that affected your consciousness, this rule won't apply to you and you'll need to be 12 months seizure free before you can drive.

This rule might apply if you've been told you have focal aware seizures. But the driving agency will need full information about what happens to you during your seizures before deciding if you can drive.



Changing or stopping your medicine

If you need to change, reduce or stop your epilepsy medicine, you might need to stop driving for a period of time.

I'm changing my epilepsy medicine. Do I need to stop driving?

Your doctor will advise you if you need to stop driving and for how long. The advice they give you will depend on whether the new medicine you are switching to is likely to be as effective as the old one.

You don't need to tell the driving agency or return your licence, unless you have a seizure.

My doctor has advised me to stop taking epilepsy medicine. Do I need to stop driving?

The driving agencies recommend that you should stop driving while coming off your medicine, and for 6 months after you've stopped taking it. Your doctor will tell you if you can start driving again earlier than this. You don't need to tell the driving agency or return your licence, unless you have a seizure.

Sleep seizures and seizures that don't affect your consciousness

If you only have sleep seizures or seizures that don't affect your consciousness, you might not need to stop driving while coming off your medicine. Your doctor will tell you if this is the case.

What happens if I have a seizure while I'm changing or withdrawing my epilepsy medicine?

If you have a seizure within 6 months of changing or withdrawing your epilepsy medicine, in most cases you'll need to stop driving and surrender your licence.

You're likely to lose your licence for 12 months, but you may be able to get it back sooner than this if all these things apply:

- You go back on the medicine that worked to control your seizures
- You've been back on that treatment for at least 6 months
- You've been seizure free since going back on that treatment

Sleep seizures and seizures that don't affect your consciousness

If you only have sleep seizures or seizures that don't affect your consciousness, you might not need to tell the driving agency or stop driving if you have a seizure while coming off your medicine. This would only apply if the driving agency has already said you can drive with your type of seizures, and the seizure you have is the same type.

Driving a bus, coach or lorry (group 2 licences)

For safety reasons the rules for driving a bus, coach or lorry are much stricter than for car and motorbike licences. These rules apply if you want to drive any of these vehicles:

- Medium-sized vehicles (categories C1 and C1E)
- Large vehicles (categories C and CE)
- Minibuses (categories D1 and D1E)
- Buses (categories D and DE)

Licences that include any of these categories are sometimes called group 2 licences.

- You may be able to get a group 2 licence if you:
- Have been seizure free for at least 10 years
- Have not taken any epilepsy medicine in that time
- Are not at risk of more seizures
- Are not a source of danger while driving



Driving vehicles for work

To drive any vehicle for work on public roads, you will need to hold a driving licence that includes the category for that type of vehicle. These are some of the vehicles we get asked about most often:

Ambulances

The type of driving licence you need to drive an ambulance depends on the ambulance service trust that you are applying to and the types of vehicles it uses. You may need a CI category on your licence. To get this category added to your licence, you need to meet the rules for a group 2 licence.

Taxis

You will need a standard car driving licence to drive a taxi, but some local authorities may set higher medical standards on top of this. For example, Transport for London will only grant a private hire drivers licence to people who meet the medical standards for a group 2 licence.

Forklift trucks and farm vehicles

You don't need a driving licence to drive a forklift truck or farm vehicles on private land. But, if your seizures are not well controlled, it could put you or others at risk when you are driving. The Health and Safety Executive says employers should assess a worker's fitness to drive on a case-by-case basis.

If you need to drive any vehicle on public roads, you will need to meet the medical standards to hold a driving licence for that type of vehicle.

Getting your licence back, getting a first licence or renewing your licence

When can I reapply for my driving licence?

You can reapply for your licence up to 8 weeks before the date you meet the legal standard for driving. For most people this is 12 months after their last seizure, but it could vary depending on the number and type of seizures you've had. See our information about the driving rules on page 13 to check which rules apply to you.

Before reapplying, the driving agencies say you should check with your doctor that you meet the medical standards for driving. If your doctor is not sure, they can refer to the DVLA's document *Assessing fitness to drive: a guide for medical professionals*. This is available on the gov.uk website.

The DVA in Northern Ireland follows these standards too.

How do I reapply?

These are the forms you need to reapply for your licence:

England, Scotland and Wales	Northern Ireland
DI application form (available from Post Offices or to order from DVLA). Tick the box saying you are renewing your licence.	DLI application form (available from Post Offices). Once DVA has received your application, they will send you a medical questionnaire.
FEPI medical questionnaire (download or order from DVLA)	
Send them both to the address on the FEPI form.	

We recommend sending the forms back by recorded delivery, so you know when the driving agency has got them.

When can I start driving again?

When you can start driving again depends on whether you surrendered your licence, or it was revoked by the driving agency.

If you're not sure if you surrendered your licence or it was revoked, you can check your driving licence online at [gov.uk/view-driving-licence](https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence). This is only available for licences issued by the DVLA.

If you surrendered your licence

If you surrendered your licence, you may be able to drive as soon as you meet the medical standards for driving, even if the driving agency is still dealing with your application and you haven't yet had your licence back. In England, Scotland and Wales, Section 88 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 allows a person to drive if they are temporarily without a driving licence. In Northern Ireland, the law that allows this is the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order, 1981.

To drive while your application is with the driving agency you must meet a number of criteria. Full information about this is available in the leaflet INFI88/6 - *Can I drive while my application is with DVLA?* (England, Scotland and Wales) which is available on the DVLA website. Information for drivers in Northern Ireland is available on the NI direct website.

It is up to you to be sure you meet the rules for driving while you are waiting to get your licence back. Your doctor does not need to confirm you are safe to drive. But if they tell you **not** to drive, you must follow their advice.

If you drive while waiting for your licence, it's a good idea to keep a copy of the leaflet explaining the Section 88 rules in your car (if you live in England, Scotland or Wales). This can be helpful to explain why you are driving if you are stopped by police. If you live in Northern Ireland, you could keep a printout of the NI direct webpage explaining the rules.

If your driving licence was revoked

If your driving licence was revoked, you must wait until the driving agency has completed its medical enquiries and sent you back your licence. You can start driving again as soon as you have got your licence back.



How do I apply for a first provisional licence?

To apply for a first provisional licence, you need to meet the same medical standards for a full car or motorcycle licence. You must wait to get your licence before you start driving lessons.

Here's how to apply:

England, Scotland and Wales	Northern Ireland
Apply online at gov.uk/apply-first-provisional-driving-licence Or Apply by post with a DI application form (available from Post Offices or to order from DVLA) and FEPI medical questionnaire (download or order from DVLA)	DLI application form (available from Post Offices). Once DVA has received your application, they will send you a medical questionnaire.

How long will my licence last?

Most people with epilepsy will be issued with a short-term medical driving licence. It may last for 1, 2, 3 or 5 years. If you have been seizure free for 5 years, the driving agency may issue you with a standard 10 year licence.

How do I renew my short term medical licence?

When your licence is about to expire, you will need to renew it. The driving agency should write to you when it's time to renew. In England, Scotland and Wales you can renew online or by post using the form they send you. Alternatively, you can send a *DI* form along with the *FEPI* form to tell them about your epilepsy. See page 21 for where to get these forms.

In Northern Ireland, the DVA will send you a form to renew your licence when it is due for renewal.

You can keep driving while you are waiting for your new licence, as long as your epilepsy hasn't changed. Full information about this is available in the leaflet *INF188/6 - Can I drive while my application is with DVLA?* (England, Scotland and Wales). Information for drivers in Northern Ireland is available on the NI direct website.

I've got my group 1 licence back but the categories of vehicle I can drive has changed. Why is that?

Standard driving licences issued before 1 January 1997 included the categories C1 (lorries weighing between 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes) and D1 (minibuses, 9-16 seats, not for hire or reward). Licences issued after 1 January 1997 do not include these categories. If you've had to give up your pre-1997 licence for medical reasons, the C1 and D1 categories will have been taken off. To drive these category vehicles, you need to meet the stricter medical standards for bus and lorry drivers.

Will my epilepsy stop me getting car insurance?

Insurance companies are not allowed to have a blanket policy to refuse or put up the premiums of all people with epilepsy. This would be disability discrimination. But they are allowed to charge you more, or refuse to insure you, if there's a greater risk in insuring you because of your epilepsy. Their decision must be based on reliable and relevant evidence.

It's worth shopping around to find the cover that's right for you at the best price. If a company refuses to insure you, or you feel their premiums are unfairly high, you can ask them for evidence to explain why. If they can't provide evidence, they could be guilty of disability discrimination under the equality laws.

We're not able to recommend any car insurance companies. But some people find it helpful to ask for recommendations from other people with epilepsy on our facebook and twitter pages.



If you disagree with the driving agency's decision

If you disagree with the driving agency's decision to revoke or refuse your licence, you can write to them to ask them to reconsider. You must be able to provide relevant information that was not included in the original assessment. With your letter, you must also include:

- Evidence that you meet the required standards for driving (for example, a letter from your GP or neurologist)
- The reference number from the letter the driving agency sent you

How can I appeal against the driving agency's decision?

You also have the option to appeal the driving agency's decision to refuse or revoke your licence. It's important to get legal advice before deciding whether or not to appeal. If you don't win, you may have to pay the driving agency's costs.

Country	Who to appeal to	Time you have to appeal
England and Wales	Your local magistrate's court	Six months from the date of DVLA's decision
Scotland	Your local sheriff's court	21 days from the date of DVLA's decision
Northern Ireland	Your local clerk of petty sessions	Three months from the date of DVA's decision letter

You must also tell the DVLA or DVA in writing that you intend to appeal.

Driving agency contact details

England, Scotland and Wales

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Address: Drivers Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU

Tel: 0300 790 6806

Website: gov.uk/browse/driving

Email or webchat: through website

Northern Ireland

Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

Address: Drivers Medical Section, DVA, Castlerock Road,
Waterside, Coleraine, BT51 3TB

Tel: 0300 200 7861

Website: nidirect.gov.uk/driver-licensing

Email: dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk



About this publication

This booklet is written by Epilepsy Action's advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If you would like to know where our information is from, or there is anything else you would like to say about this booklet, please contact us.

Epilepsy Action is proud to be a member of PIF Tick, the quality mark for health information. Find out more at piftick.org.uk

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Disclaimer

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information in its publications but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

First aid for tonic-clonic seizures

The person goes stiff, loses consciousness, falls to the floor and begins to jerk or convulse.

Do...

- Protect the person from injury (remove harmful objects from nearby)
- Cushion their head
- Aid breathing by gently placing the person on their side (in the recovery position) once the jerking has stopped (see picture)
- Stay with them until recovery is complete
- Be calmly reassuring



Don't...

- Restrain the person's movements
- Put anything in their mouth
- Try to move them unless they are in danger
- Give them anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered
- Attempt to bring them round

Call 999 for an ambulance if...

- You know it is the person's first seizure **or**
- The seizure continues for more than five minutes **or**
- One seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness between seizures **or**
- The person is seriously injured **or**
- They have trouble breathing after the seizure has stopped

First aid for focal (partial) seizures

The person is not aware of their surroundings or of what they are doing. They may pluck at their clothes, smack their lips, swallow repeatedly or wander around.

Do...

- Guide the person away from danger
- Stay with the person until recovery is complete
- Be calmly reassuring
- Explain anything that they may have missed

Don't...

- Restrain the person
- Act in a way that could frighten them, such as making abrupt movements or shouting at them
- Assume the person is aware of what is happening, or what has happened
- Give them anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered
- Attempt to bring them round

Call 999 for an ambulance if...

- You know it is the person's first seizure **or**
- The seizure continues for more than five minutes **or**
- One seizure follows another without the person regaining awareness between seizures **or**
- The person is seriously injured

Epilepsy Action has information on what to do if someone has a seizure in a wheelchair.

Epilepsy Action's support services



helpline

Our friendly helpline team offer confidential advice and information to anyone affected by epilepsy:

Freephone 0808 800 5050

Staff are text relay trained and able to offer advice and information in 150 languages, via an interpreting service.

Live chat

Visit epilepsy.org.uk to chat with a member of the helpline team. We usually reply to chat requests within 5 minutes.

Email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk

Send us your question about epilepsy. We aim to reply within 48 hours (on workdays).

To see our opening hours and find out more about the support we offer visit: epilepsy.org.uk/helpline



talk and support

Our Talk and Support groups offer an opportunity to connect with others affected by epilepsy. You can join a group which meets face-to-face or online.



befriending

Our befriending service links people who are affected by epilepsy to a volunteer befriender. Your befriender can listen if you are going through a difficult time and could also help you take steps towards positive change.

Continued on page 35

Driving and epilepsy

We would like to know if you have found this booklet helpful.

As a result of reading the information, please let us know if you agree (tick yes) or disagree (tick no) with any of the following statements.

Yes	No	
		I feel more informed about issues to do with epilepsy
		I feel more confident about talking to my GP/epilepsy specialist/epilepsy nurse/other (cross out those that don't apply)
		I have talked to my employer/colleague/teacher/family/ other (cross out those that don't apply) and they have improved how well they support me
		I have used other Epilepsy Action services, such as the website, the Epilepsy Action Helpline or support groups

Please tell us how you think we can improve this information

Please return the completed form to:

**FREEPOST RTGS-LEYK-XGCK, Epilepsy Services, Epilepsy Action,
New Anstey House, Gate Way Drive, Yeadon, Leeds LS19 7XY**

You can also give us feedback online. Visit [epilepsy.org.uk/feedback](https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/feedback)

Thank you.

Epilepsy Action
FREEPOST RTGS-LEYK-XGCK,
New Anstey House,
Gate Way Drive,
Yeadon,
Leeds LS19 7XY

Registered charity in England and Wales (No. 234343)



counselling

Our counselling service is available to adults living in Northern Ireland and Wales who are affected by epilepsy, caring for someone affected by epilepsy, or the parent of someone affected by epilepsy.



**family support
Northern Ireland**

Our family support services offer support to families and carers of people affected by epilepsy in Northern Ireland and Wales.

**To find out more about the services we offer, including ways to get in touch and how to apply, visit:
epilepsy.org.uk/support-for-you.**

Information about epilepsy

Epilepsy Action has a wide range of information on our website about many different aspects of epilepsy. You can also download our information as a factsheet.

If you would like our information printed in large text, you can order this by contacting the Epilepsy Action Helpline.

Epilepsy Action Helpline:

freephone 0808 800 5050
epilepsy.org.uk



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Epilepsy Action

New Anstey House, Gate Way Drive, Yeadon, Leeds LS19 7XY

tel 0113 210 8800 **email** epilepsy@epilepsy.org.uk

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Environmental statement

All Epilepsy Action booklets are printed on environmentally friendly, low-chlorine bleached paper. All paper used to make this booklet is from well-managed forests.