

Driving after stroke

After having a stroke, you may be eager to get back in the driving seat. This factsheet explains how stroke and transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs) can affect your ability to drive and the procedures that you should follow if you want to drive again. It also lists organisations that can provide further advice and information.

Key points

After a stroke or TIA:

You **cannot** drive for one month.

You usually don't need to inform the DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland) at this stage.

After one month you may be able to drive again, as long as your doctor agrees it is safe for you to do so.

Why can't I drive immediately after having a stroke?

After a stroke **your ability to drive safely can be affected in various ways**. You may have physical or visual problems, or you may have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time or with making quick decisions. The following section explains this in more detail.

Physical effects

Weakness in your arm, leg or both is common after a stroke. You may also

experience other physical effects which include pain, changes in sensation, paralysis and muscle spasms. For further information, see our factsheet *F33, Physical effects of stroke*.

Problems with sight

A stroke can cause a variety of problems with your sight. These include double or blurred vision, loss of central vision in one or both of your eyes, and visual field loss. For further information, see our factsheet *F37, Visual problems after stroke*.

Cognitive effects

Driving requires many different cognitive skills. You need to be able to concentrate, navigate, multitask and make quick decisions. After a stroke you may have difficulty concentrating, understanding, solving problems, or making decisions. Your perception of space and distance may have changed, or you may have problems with your memory. For further information, see our factsheet *F7, Memory, thinking and understanding after stroke*.

Fatigue

After your stroke you may find that you lack energy and feel extremely tired. This may affect your ability to drive. For further information, see our factsheet *F18, Fatigue after stroke*.

Epilepsy

A small number of people have a seizure within the first 24 hours of their stroke, and some go on to develop epilepsy. This condition can affect your ability to drive. For further information, see our factsheet *F24, Epilepsy and stroke*.

The driving rules

In England, Scotland and Wales, driving rules are set by the **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)**. In Northern Ireland this responsibility rests with the **Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA)**. Their rules regarding medical fitness to drive are the same as the DVLA.

The team of stroke professionals involved in your care may be involved in assessing the skills you need for driving. They can also advise whether it is safe for you to return to driving.

After a stroke or TIA you must stop driving immediately, but for many people this is temporary. It is possible to return to driving as long as it is safe to do so and the correct procedures are followed. The DVLA produce a factsheet, *Car or motorcycle drivers who have had a stroke or transient ischaemic attack (TIA)*. This outlines when you have to inform them that you have had a stroke. This guide also applies in Northern Ireland and your medical practitioner may refer to these

when advising you.

It is your responsibility to tell the DVLA or DVA of any medical condition that may affect your ability to drive safely.

When can I drive after a stroke or a TIA?

Cars or motorcycles

If you have a licence to drive a car or motorcycle (category B licence) **you are not allowed to drive for at least one month after a stroke or TIA**. After a month you may start driving again if your doctor is happy with your recovery.

If you have had a **number of TIAs over a short period of time** you will need to wait until you have not had any TIAs for **three months** before returning to driving. You will also need to notify the DVLA/DVA.

Other vehicles

If you have a licence to drive a **large goods vehicle (LGV)** or a **passenger carrying vehicle (PCV)** **you must tell the DVLA immediately that you have had a stroke**. You are not allowed to drive this type of vehicle for **one year**. After this time you may be able to resume driving, but this will depend on how well you have recovered and also on the results of medical reports and tests.

Tractor or moped drivers (with a category F or P licence) need to follow the same rules as car users (see above).

If you drive a **taxi**, your local authority (or in London the Public Carriage Office) will

Driving after stroke

decide on the medical standards you must meet to return to driving. It is currently best practice for the same rules for drivers of PCVs to be applied to taxi drivers.

If you drive a **police, ambulance or health service vehicle**, the individual police force, NHS trust, primary care trust or local health body may require you to meet additional medical standards.

Other rules

Epilepsy

If you develop epilepsy after your stroke, you can only return to driving once you have been **free from seizures for at least one year**. You will usually be issued a licence for a **fixed period of one, two or three years** until you have been free from seizures for **five years**, at which time you may apply for a long-term licence. The actual time period will depend on the type of seizures you have, when they occurred, whether you were awake or asleep, their frequency, whether you are taking any medication and whether you have any previous history of seizures. If you have a licence to drive an LGV or PCV, you must be free from seizures for **ten years**.

Carotid endarterectomy

20 per cent of strokes are caused by **narrowing of the carotid arteries** (the two main arteries in the neck supplying blood to the brain). The main treatment for this is a carotid endarterectomy, an operation to remove the blockages and lining of the artery. You will be able to return to driving within two to three weeks providing you can perform an emergency stop safely and look over your shoulder. See our factsheet

F40, Carotid artery disease for more information on this procedure.

Do I need to notify the DVLA/DVA?

During the first month after a stroke or a single TIA you do not have to notify the DVLA/DVA, even though you are not allowed to drive.

You must notify the DVLA/DVA as soon as possible if any of the following apply:

- you have experienced multiple TIAs over a short period of time
- your condition worsens at any time
- you have experienced any form of epileptic seizure, other than ones within the first 24 hours following your stroke
- your stroke treatment included brain surgery
- you have experienced more than one stroke in the past three months
- your doctor expresses concern about your fitness to drive
- you hold a current LGV or PCV licence.

One month after your stroke you will need to notify the DVLA/DVA if you have any ongoing effects from your stroke. These might include visual field loss, cognitive or memory problems or weakness and/or paralysis in your arm or leg.

If you only experience minor arm or leg weakness and have no other problems, you may not have to notify the DVLA/DVA.

Driving after stroke

You will only need to inform them if your limb weakness restricts your ability to drive certain vehicles or you require a vehicle with specially adapted controls to suit your needs. If this happens, your driving licence will be coded to reflect the changes to your vehicle.

If you are unsure of any of the above points or whether or not you are safe to drive, you should always check with your doctor.

If you are **taken to hospital** following your stroke or TIA, the medical team should ask you if you drive and if you wish to in the future. If you do, they will assess your ability to drive safely and explain the current DVLA/DVA guidelines before you leave hospital. If you did not stay in hospital you should **speak to your GP**. Your doctor may contact other professionals or the DVLA's medical advisers for advice when making a decision.

How do I notify the DVLA/DVA?

Step 1

Firstly you will need to complete a **medical questionnaire** and send this to the DVLA Drivers Medical Group or if you live in Northern Ireland, the DVA Medical Section. You can request a form directly from the DVLA/DVA or you can download them from the Government websites:

- www.direct.gov.uk (for DVLA)
- www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring (DVA).

Step 2

Where possible the DVLA/DVA will make a decision using the information you provide. If the DVLA/DVA require more information they may:

- contact your GP or consultant for further information (with your permission)
- arrange for you to be examined by a medical officer or specialist in your local area
- ask you to take a driving assessment, eye test and/or driving test.

Step 3

Once the DVLA/DVA has received all the relevant information their medical adviser will make a decision about whether you can drive again.

The DVLA/DVA may make one of the following decisions:

- You may be able to keep your licence.
- You may be issued a licence for a fixed period of one, two or three years, after which time your medical fitness will be reviewed again.
- You may be issued with a licence that requires you to drive a vehicle with adapted controls.
- Your licence may be taken away. If this happens, you will be given a reason for this decision. You should be told if you can reapply for your licence, and you should receive a notice explaining how you can appeal the decision.

The DVLA aims to make a decision within 15 working days. If they require further information, they will aim to make the decision within 90 days. If the DVA are making the decision, they will aim to decide within three to four weeks. If further

Driving after stroke

information is required about your medical conditions or you have an LGV or PCV licence, they will aim to make a decision within 90 working days.

What happens if I don't notify the DVLA/DVA?

If you do not inform the DVLA or DVA of a medical condition you may be committing a **criminal offence**. As a result you may be fined and you could lose your licence.

Do I need to notify my insurance company?

Before you start driving again you must **tell your insurance company** about your stroke or TIA. Failure to do this may result in them not honouring any claim you may make in the future. Medical conditions may affect the amount you pay for your insurance so you may wish to shop around for a competitive quote. If after one month your doctor confirms you are safe to drive again, your insurance company may ask you to tell the DVLA/DVA about your stroke or TIA. They may also require confirmation that you are safe to drive again. Individual insurance companies have their own procedures, **so talk to your insurers and check your policy carefully**.

What if my doctor says I should not drive?

If your doctor decides it is not safe for you to return to driving at the moment, you can either voluntarily surrender your licence or inform the DVLA/DVA and they will make a decision about your licence.

Returning to the wheel

The decision to return to driving (if you are able to) is a personal one. Some people prefer

to build up their confidence in their own home and around their local community first. For others it is an urgent goal. If you are still seeing an **occupational therapist**, talk to them about it. They can tailor your therapy to help prepare you to return to driving.

Before you start driving again, you may find it helpful to have a few **refresher lessons** with a qualified driving instructor. You can find driving instructors in your area by looking in your local phonebook or on the internet. Check that they are registered with and approved by the Driving Standards Agency (DSA). You may wish to look for an instructor that has a good reputation and has a car that suits your requirements. Mobility centres can also provide advice and tuition about returning to driving (see *Useful organisations* section).

If you currently drive a manual car you could consider switching to an automatic instead, as they can be easier to drive.

The Blue Badge Scheme

The Blue Badge scheme provides **parking concessions for people with severely restricted mobility** who have problems using public transport. The scheme operates throughout the UK with small variations regarding the use of the badge in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The badge enables holders to park close to where they need to go by using designated parking spaces in car parks and on-street parking areas. Your local authority will be able to tell you if you are eligible for a badge, how to apply and more details about the scheme. The Department for Transport also produces a number of useful booklets about the scheme.

Specially adapted cars

Even if you have physical disabilities following your stroke, it may still be possible for you to drive. There are various vehicle adaptations and motoring accessories that can make driving possible and more comfortable.

Specialist **mobility centres** can carry out assessments and provide advice about making adaptations to your vehicle which can enable you to return to driving. They can also provide assessments for passengers who have disabilities, and information on how to safely lift wheelchairs in and out of a car. There are centres across the UK. (See the *Useful organisations* section.)

If you are receiving the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance or the War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement, you can exchange some or all of your benefit to lease a new car, powered wheelchair or scooter. This is called the **Motability Scheme** (see the *Useful organisations* section for more information).

Concerns about the safety of others

Sometimes stroke survivors find it difficult to recognise the effects of their stroke. This includes a condition called neglect, where someone does not recognise things on one side, usually the left side. If someone has cognitive problems, they may have difficulties with understanding and making decisions. Stroke can also affect your judgment and in rare cases, can cause a condition where someone is unaware they have a disability (this is called anosognosia). In severe cases someone may be in denial about their own limitations.

If someone has been driving for many years it can be hard to suddenly stop, and they may need **support and guidance** from other people such as family and friends. Family members and professionals may need to remind them that they can no longer drive because of the potential risk to themselves and others. It may be helpful to remind them of the benefits of not driving – for example, using public transport may cost less than driving and maintaining a car. **If you do not think a family member is safe to drive it is important you discuss this with them or their GP.**

What should I do if I am unable to return to driving?

If you are unable to drive, you may feel that you have lost your independence and have to rely on others to get out and about, particularly if you live in a rural area and public transport is hard to access. You may feel isolated, frustrated, or low.

Talk to your family and your healthcare professionals about how you are feeling. They can help you to look at other options that will help you do the things that are important to you (such as seeing friends and taking part in hobbies or community activities). For further support, you may also be interested in our factsheets *F10, Depression after stroke* and *F36, Emotional changes after stroke*.

Many people recover from some of the effects of their stroke slowly over time. If you regain certain abilities, you might consider having a repeat assessment for driving at a later time.

However you may not fully recover from all of the effects of your stroke, so it is

Driving after stroke

important to find other ways to cope, including finding alternative ways to get out and about.

There are schemes that can make travelling easier for people with disabilities. In some areas local councils provide **community transport schemes** for people who have disabilities and are unable to use public transport. The services all vary, but they may be able to take you door-to-door to places in your local area or on shopping trips. You can **contact your local council** to find out more about schemes in your area. There are also dial-a-ride services in many parts of the UK where you can book wheelchair accessible transport.

If you are unable to use public transport because of your disability, the **Access to Work Scheme** may be able to help you with the cost of getting to and from work. A Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus (Jobs and Benefits Office in Northern Ireland) will be able to advise you on this.

If you can travel by train, you may wish to buy a **Disabled Person's Railcard**. This entitles you to a third off the cost of most rail fares in England, Scotland and Wales. If you live in Northern Ireland, you may be entitled to a half fare **SmartPass** which can be used for bus and rail travel – contact Translink. (For more information on both of these see *Useful organisations*.)

If you can travel by bus, you may be entitled to a **free bus pass** if you meet certain criteria, for example if you are blind or partially sighted, or have difficulty walking. How to apply and the times you can use your pass will depend on where you live in the UK. In England and Wales, contact your local

council for more information. In Scotland, contact Transport Scotland to apply for a National Entitlement Card (see *Useful organisations*). For Northern Ireland, you may be entitled to the SmartPass (see above).

Many towns and shopping centres also offer **Shopmobility** schemes that hire out manual wheelchairs and powered scooters to anyone who needs help with getting out and about.

Useful organisations

All organisations listed are UK wide unless otherwise stated.

Stroke Association

Stroke Helpline: 0303 3033 100

Email: info@stroke.org.uk

Website: stroke.org.uk

Contact us for information about stroke, emotional support and details of local services and support groups.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) Drivers Medical Group (England, Scotland and Wales)

Drivers Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU

Tel: 0300 790 6806

Email: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.dft.gov.uk/dvla

Produces a *Customer Service Guide for Drivers with Medical Conditions* and an *At a Glance Guide to the Current Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive*.

Driver and Vehicle Agency (Northern Ireland)

DVA Medical Section, Driver Licensing, County Hall, Castlerock Road, Coleraine, BT51 3TB

Tel: 0845 402 4000

Email: dvlni@doeni.gov.uk

Website: www.dvlni.gov.uk

The only driver, vehicle and vehicle operator licensing authority in Northern Ireland.

Directgov (England, Scotland and Wales)

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

The Government's website provides information about all aspects of motoring, including how to tell the DVLA about a medical condition. Download the relevant DVLA guidance, medical questionnaires for notifying the DVLA of a medical condition and *A Guide to Driving Ordinary Vehicles (Group 1) Following a Stroke, TIA, Mini-stroke, Cerebral Thrombosis or Amaurosis Fugax*.

Nidirect (Northern Ireland)

Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring

Brings together lots of information about motoring from government departments and agencies in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Transport (DfT)

Blue Badge Scheme

Helpline: 0161 367 0009

Website: www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/bluebadge

Produces some useful guides in paper, braille and audio formats including *How can I get a Blue Badge?*

Disabled Motoring UK

Tel: 01508 489 449

Website: www.disabledmotoring.org

A campaigning charity run by disabled people for disabled motorists, passengers and carers.

Disabled Motorists Federation

Tel: 0191 416 3127

Website: www.dmfed.org.uk

A membership organisation providing advice and information to disabled people and their

carers about motoring and travel.

Ford Mobility

Tel: 0845 604 0019

Website: www.ford.co.uk/mobility

A company initiative offering general advice and information on Ford Mobility vehicles.

Forum of Mobility Centres

Tel: 0800 559 3636

Website: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Contact the forum to find out where your nearest mobility centre is located and for more information about the services that the centres provide.

Motability

Tel: 0845 456 4566

Website: www.motability.co.uk

The Motability scheme enables people with disabilities who receive the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance to obtain cars, powered wheelchairs or scooters.

National Association for Bikers with a Disability

Tel: 0844 415 4849

Website: www.nabd.org.uk

A charity providing information, support and grants to help disabled people enjoy independent motorcycling.

Regional Driving Assessment Centre

Tel: 0845 337 1540

Website: www.rdac.co.uk

A charity dedicated to helping drivers and passengers to use their own vehicle in order to be independent.

Ricability (the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs)

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Website: www.ricability.org.uk

This charity provides free, practical and

unbiased reports for older and disabled people. They produce a booklet titled *Motoring after a Stroke*, and a number of useful guides including *The Ins and Outs of Choosing a Car*, *Car Controls*, *Getting a Wheelchair into a Car*, and *People Lifters*.

A2B

Website: www.a2binfo.net

A2B is a project bringing together a range of community transport services and you can search their website for schemes in England.

Disabled Person's Railcard

Tel: 0845 605 0525

Website: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

This offers a third off rail fares for eligible disabled people in England, Scotland and Wales.

Translink

Tel: 02890 666 630

Website: www.translink.co.uk

Runs a travel scheme called SmartPass that offers concessions for older people and those claiming Disability Living Allowance in Northern Ireland.

Transport Scotland

Tel: 0141 272 7100

Email: info@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.transportscotland.gov.uk

Runs the National Entitlement Card scheme, offering free bus travel for older and disabled people in Scotland.

National Federation of Shopmobility UK

Tel: 0844 4141 850

Email: info@shopmobilityuk.org

Website: www.shopmobilityuk.org

The federation can tell you if there is a shopmobility scheme near you.

Transport for London (TfL)

Tel: 0843 222 1234 (24 hours a day)

Website: www.tfl.gov.uk

TfL provides information on assisted travel in London, large print and audio versions of their tube maps, maps with details of step free stations and a *Guide Around London – Your Guide to Accessibility*.

British Insurance Brokers' Association

Consumer Helpline: 0870 950 1790

Website: www.biba.org.uk

An organisation that can help you find insurance brokers in your local area.

Disclaimer: The Stroke Association provides the details of other organisations for information only. Inclusion in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement.

Produced by the Stroke Association's Information Service.

For sources used, visit stroke.org.uk

© Stroke Association

Factsheet 2, version 1 published September 2012
(next review due June 2014)

Item code: **A01F02**



£5 could help us answer a helpline call from a desperately worried person looking for answers about stroke. Text 'stroke' to 70007 to donate £5 today.

Texts cost £5 plus your standard network rate of which a minimum £4.70 will go to the Stroke Association.
Full terms and conditions at www.stroke.org.uk/textterms

Stroke Association is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in England and Wales (No 61274).
Registered office: Stroke Association House, 240 City Road, London EC1V 2PR. Registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in Northern Ireland (XT33805) Isle of Man (No 945) and Jersey (NPO 369).