

Driving after a stroke

After having a stroke, you may be eager to get back in the driving seat. This guide explains how stroke and TIA (transient ischaemic attack or mini-stroke) 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.

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 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, weakness and problems with balance. For further information, please see our guide 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, please see our guide F37, *Visual problems after stroke*.

Key points

After a stroke or single TIA:

- you cannot drive for one month
- if you drive a car or motorcycle, 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
- if you have a licence to drive a large goods vehicle (LGV) or passenger carrying vehicle (PCV) you must tell the DVLA about your stroke or TIA straight away.

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.

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Your perception of space and distance may have changed, or you may have problems with your memory. For further information, see our guide 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 guide 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. See later in this guide, and for further information about epilepsy, see our guide F24, *Epilepsy and stroke*.

Rules about driving after a stroke

This is a general guide to driving after a stroke. You must get individual advice from your doctor about how your medical condition and any treatment you may be having affects your driving. You can find more detail in the publication *Assessing fitness to drive: a guide for medical professionals*, available on the GOV.UK website.

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 help with assessing the skills you need for driving. They can also advise whether it is safe it is 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's safe to do so and correct procedures are followed.

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 an ischaemic stroke or a TIA?

Cars or motorcycles

If you have a licence to drive a car or motorcycle you are not allowed to drive for at least one month after a stroke or a single TIA. After a month you may start driving again if your doctor is happy with your recovery. The doctor will need to see that there are no remaining neurological symptoms, in particular any visual or cognitive difficulties. If you are left with some limb weakness only, you may still be allowed to continue driving.

If you have 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 or a TIA. 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 again on how well you have recovered and also on the results of medical reports and tests.

If you drive a taxi, your local authority (or in London the Public Carriage Office) will 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 same medical standards apply as for those holding Group 1 (cars and motorcycles) or Group 2 (includes large lorries and buses) licences. However the individual police force, NHS trust, primary care trust or local health body may require you to meet additional medical standards.

When can I drive after a haemorrhagic stroke?

Subarachnoid haemorrhage

Car and motorcycle drivers must not drive until they have been certified safe to do so by their doctor, but they do not need to notify the DVLA/DVA. You have to wait for a minimum of six months before driving again if you had surgery for an intracranial aneurysm.

Large vehicle and public service vehicle drivers must stop driving and must inform the DVLA/DVA. If and when they can return to driving depends on the cause of the

haemorrhage, where in the brain it took place, and the type of treatment given. Some people will be considered for re-licensing after six months, but others will not be able to return to driving. Speak to your doctor to discuss your stroke and the treatment you have had, and whether you will be able to return to driving.

Intracerebral haemorrhage due to supratentorial arteriovenous malformations (AVM)

Car and motorcycle drivers with this condition must stop driving for at least one month. If you do not need treatment for the condition, or if your treatment is stereotactic radiotherapy or embolisation, you do not need to notify the DVLA, and you may resume driving after one month once a doctor has confirmed it is safe to do so. For treatment with craniotomy you must notify the DVLA and wait six months before a doctor can declare you fit for driving.

Large goods vehicle and passenger-carrying vehicle drivers must notify the DVLA/DVA and their licences will be revoked for at least five years, depending on treatment method and outcome. You can drive again in the following cases:

- after five years if you have been treated by stereotactic radiotherapy and remain free of seizures, and the lesion has been completely removed
- after 10 years if you have been treated by craniotomy or embolisation and remain free of seizures, and the lesion has been completely removed
- your licence will be permanently revoked if you are not considered eligible for treatment.

Intracranial haemorrhage due to infratentorial arteriovenous malformations (AVM)

Car and motorcycle drivers with this condition may continue driving and do not need to notify the DVLA as long as they do not experience any symptoms that may impair their driving.

Large goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle drivers must notify the DVLA/DVA and their licences will be revoked for a period of time. If the condition is not treated, your license will be revoked permanently. However you may be able to return to driving if you have been treated and the AVM has been removed, and you do not have any symptoms that could impair your driving.

Other health conditions

Epilepsy

Some people have a seizure or develop epilepsy after a stroke. If you do have a seizure or develop epilepsy, you must stop driving, and you must inform the DVLA/DVA.

If you have a seizure within 24 hours of a stroke but don't have any more after that, the DVLA will assess your case on an individual basis.

If you have epilepsy, when you can drive again depends on a number of factors including how long you go without a seizure, and if you're on epilepsy medication. A Group 1 driver (car and motorcycle) may be able to drive again after six months, depending on their risk of another seizure. They may be issued a 'short-term medical review licence', and after five years can apply for a full licence. A Group 2 driver (bus and

lorry), needs to be free from seizures for ten years without taking epilepsy medication.

Carotid artery stenosis

Following a diagnosis of carotid artery stenosis (narrowing of the carotid arteries), car and motorcycle drivers don't need to stop driving, and don't need to notify the DVLA/DVA.

Large goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle drivers do need to notify the DVLA, and may only continue driving if a doctor considers it safe to do so. If you have had surgery or radiology as treatment, you may have to pass a function or exercise test before you can safely drive again.

Carotid endarterectomy

Narrowing of the carotid arteries (the two main arteries in the neck supplying blood to the brain) can lead to strokes. The main treatment for this is a carotid endarterectomy, an operation to remove the fatty deposits blocking the artery. You may be able to return to driving within two to three weeks providing you can perform an emergency stop safely and look over your shoulder. Please see our guide F40, *Carotid artery disease* for more information on this surgery.

Do I need to notify the DVLA/DVA?

During the first month after a stroke or a single TIA, Group 1 drivers (car and motorcycle) do not have to notify the DVLA/DVA, even though you are not allowed to drive.

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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 are a Group 2 driver (lorry and bus).

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 arms or legs.

If you only experience minor arm or leg weakness and have no other problems, you may not have to notify the DVLA/DVA. 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 driver's 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 if you drive and if you wish to in the future. If you do, they should 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

Drivers in England, Wales and Scotland can complete an online form. Drivers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can also notify the DVLA or DVA by post, email or telephone.

- www.gov.uk/report-driving-medical-condition (online form) or by post to Drivers Medical Enquiries (see *Other sources of help and information*); telephone **0300 790 6806** or send an email via an online form.
- Drivers in Northern Ireland can: post both parts of their driving licence with a covering letter explaining their condition to the Drivers Medical Section (see *Other sources of help and information*); telephone **0300 200 7861** or email dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk giving details of your specific medical condition so that you can be sent the correct medical form.

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, three or five years, (one, two or three by the DVA) 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 six weeks. You will be notified if the decision is going to take longer. If the DVA are making the decision, they will aim to decide within three to four weeks. If further information is required about your medical conditions or you have a LGV or PCV licence, the decision will take longer.

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

Failure to inform the DVLA or DVA of a listed medical condition is a criminal offence. As a result you could be fined up to £1000, and if you have an accident, you could be prosecuted.

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 a 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/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 have 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 about returning to driving (see the *Other sources of help and information* 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 get to 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 *Other sources of help and information*).

If you are receiving:

- higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (HRMC DLA)
- enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (ERMC PIP)
- War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement (WPMS)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP)

and you have at least one year award length remaining, 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 *Other sources of help and information*).

Concerns about the safety of others

Sometimes stroke survivors find it difficult to recognise the effects of stroke. This includes a condition called neglect, where someone is not aware of things to one side of them. If someone has cognitive problems, they may have difficulties with understanding and making decisions.

Stroke can also affect your judgement and, in rare cases, can cause a condition where someone is unaware they have a disability, 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 and 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 some of your independence. You may 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 guides F10, *Depression after stroke* and F36, *Emotional changes after stroke*.

Many people recover from some of the effects of their stroke 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 important to find other ways to cope, including alternative ways to get out and about.

Community transport

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.

Access to Work

If you are unable to access 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.

Trains

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 *Other sources of help and information*.

Bus

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 Scotland contact your local council; local authorities in Wales. For Northern Ireland, you may be entitled to the SmartPass.

Shopmobility

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

Where to get help and information

From the Stroke Association

Talk to us

Our Stroke Helpline is for anyone affected by a stroke, including family, friends and carers. The Helpline can give you information and support on any aspect of stroke.

Call us on **0303 3033 100**, from a textphone **18001 0303 3033 100** or email **info@stroke.org.uk**.

Read our publications

We publish detailed information about a wide range of stroke topics including reducing your risk of a stroke and rehabilitation. Read online at stroke.org.uk or call the Helpline to ask for printed copies.

Other sources of help and information

Vehicle and driving organisations

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

Website: www.gov.uk/dvla

Drivers' medical enquiries: 0300 790 6806

Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) (Northern Ireland)

Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring/

Tel: 0300 200 7861

Email: dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Blue Badge Scheme

Website: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Helpline:

0343 100 1000 (England)

0343 100 1001 (Scotland)

0343 100 1002 (Wales)

Details of the Blue Badge scheme allowing motorists with disabilities to park in convenient spots.

Disabled Motoring UK

Website: www.disabledmotoring.org

Tel: 01508 489 449

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

Disabled Motorists Federation

Website: www.dmfed.org.uk

Tel: 0191 416 3127

A membership organisation providing advice and information to disabled people and their carers about motoring and travel.

Driving Mobility

Website: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Tel: 0800 559 3636

Email: info@drivingmobility.org.uk

A network of 16 centres that offer information and assessment to drivers with disabilities. Contact them to find out where your nearest mobility centre is located and for more information about the services that the centres provide.

Ford Motability

Website: www.ford.co.uk/motability

Tel: 0345 604 0019

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

Motability

Website: www.motability.co.uk

Tel: 0845 456 4566

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

National Association for Bikers with a Disability

Website: www.nabd.org.uk

Tel: 0844 415 4849

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

Regional Driving Assessment Centre

Website: www.rdac.co.uk

Tel: 0300 300 2240

Email: info@rdac.co.uk

An independent charity dedicated to helping people who are or would like to be drivers or passengers in their own vehicle in order to be independent.

Ricability (the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs)

Website: www.rica.org.uk

Tel: 0207 427 2460

Email: mail@rica.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 *Choosing a car*, *Car Controls* and *Getting a Wheelchair into a Car*.

Public transport services and alternative transport schemes

Disabled person's railcard (England, Wales, Scotland)

Website:

www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

Tel: 0345 605 0525

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

National Federation of Shopmobility UK

Website: nfsuk.org

Tel: 01933 229 644

Email: shopmobility@bhta.com

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

Translink

Website: www.translink.co.uk

Tel: 02890 666 630

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

Transport for London (TfL)

Website: www.tfl.gov.uk

Tel: 0843 222 1234

Email: tflaccessibility@tfl.gov.uk

TfL provides information on assisted travel in London, large print and audio versions of their tube maps, maps with details of the step-free stations and a Getting around London guide.

Transport Scotland

Website: www.transport.gov.scot

Tel: 0141 272 7100

Email: info@transport.gov.scot

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

Insurance

British Insurance Brokers' Association

Website: www.biba.org.uk

Consumer Helpline: 0870 950 1790

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

About our information

We want to provide the best information for people affected by stroke. That's why we ask stroke survivors and their families, as well as medical experts, to help us put our publications together.

How did we do?

To tell us what you think of this guide, or to request a list of the sources we used to create it, email us at feedback@stroke.org.uk.

Accessible formats

Visit our website if you need this information in audio, large print or braille.

Always get individual advice

Please be aware that this information is not intended as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. We strive to ensure that the content we provide is accurate and up-to-date, but information can change over time. So far as is permitted by law, the Stroke Association does not accept any liability in relation to the use of the information in this publication, or any third-party information or websites included or referred to.

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Version 2. Published September 2017
To be reviewed: September 2019
Item code: **A01F02**



We rely on your support to fund life-saving research and vital services for people affected by stroke. Join the fight against stroke now at stroke.org.uk/fundraising
Together we can conquer stroke.

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