

Let's Talk About Driving After Stroke

Can I drive after a stroke?

Driving is often a major concern after a stroke. It's not unusual for stroke survivors to want to drive. Being able to get around after a stroke is important. But while safety is always an issue when a person gets behind the wheel, it's even more important after a stroke. The reason is that the injury to the brain may change how you do things. Before you drive again, think carefully about how these changes may affect your own, your family's and other people's safety.



What are some warning signs of unsafe driving?

Often survivors are unaware of the difficulties that they might have driving again after stroke. Some may not realize all of the effects of their stroke. They may feel that they're able to drive, when it's a bad idea. Driving against your doctor's advice can be dangerous and may be illegal. In some cases, your doctor may have the legal responsibility to notify your state that you've been advised not to drive.

There are warning signs of unsafe driving. If you or someone you know has experienced some of these warning signs, please consider having your driving tested.

- Drives too fast or too slow for road conditions or posted speeds
- Needs help or instructions from passengers
- Doesn't observe signs or signals
- Makes slow or poor distance decisions
- Gets easily frustrated or confused
- Often gets lost, even in familiar areas
- Has accidents or close calls
- Drifts across lane markings into other lanes

How can I tell if I can drive?

- Talk to your doctor or occupational therapist. He or she can tell you about your stroke and whether it might change your driving. You'll also get a professional opinion based on experience.
- Contact your State Department of Motor

Vehicles in your area. Ask for the Office of Driver Safety. Ask what requirements apply to people who've had a stroke.

- Have your driving tested. There are professionals such as driver rehabilitation specialists who can evaluate your driving

How can I tell if I can drive? (continued)

ability. You'll get a behind-the-wheel evaluation and be tested for vision perception, functional ability, reaction time, judgment and cognitive abilities (thinking and problem solving). Call community rehabilitation centers or your local Department of Motor Vehicles.

- Enroll in a Driver's Training Program. For a fee, you may receive a driving assessment, classroom instruction and

suggestions for modifying your vehicle (if necessary). These programs are often available through rehabilitation centers.

- Ask your family if they have noticed changes in your communication, thinking, judgment or behavior that should be evaluated before you drive again. They often have many more opportunities to observe changes than others do.






How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets available.
- For more information on stroke, or to receive additional fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers, trained to answer your questions and offer support
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection Magazine*, a free publication for stroke survivors and caregivers

What are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

-  **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
-  **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
-  **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
-  **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
-  **Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause**

 Learn to recognize a stroke. *Because time lost is brain lost.*

Today there are treatments that can reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if you get help quickly — within 3 hours of your first symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience these warning signs!

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

When should I test my driving ability?

Is my driving restriction permanent?

If not, when might I be able to drive again?

Is there a driving evaluation, training facility or adaptive equipment that can help?

The statistics in this kit were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.

The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. Your contributions will support research and educational programs that help reduce disability and death from stroke.

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