

# Driving After Stroke: The Complete Guide

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*Are you worried that stroke has impaired your ability to drive? Has the DMV suspended your license due to stroke and you're not sure how to reinstate it?*

In today's article, you will learn the answers to these questions and more. First, we'll discuss the challenges of driving after stroke. Then, we'll provide a checklist of everything you need to drive again safely.

## Challenges for Driving After Stroke

There are 3 major challenges to consider before getting back behind the wheel after stroke:

### **Vision Problems**

About two-thirds of stroke survivors suffer from some sort of vision impairment after stroke. Visual acuity is important for safe driving, so treatment for visual problems after stroke is a must. (Learn how to treat vision problems – 4/17/2017.)

## Impaired Cognitive Skills

Sometimes stroke affects a patient's ability to concentrate, solve problems, exercise good judgement, or make quick decisions. All of these cognitive skills are essential for driving safely after stroke, so patients must work to strengthen their cognitive abilities.

(Learn how to treat cognitive problems – 5/15/2015.)

## Movement Impairment

Weakness or paralysis on one side of the body is one of the most common stroke side effects. Having impaired movement in your hands, arms, core, or legs can impair your ability to drive safely. Good movement and full-body rehabilitation is essential for getting back on the road.

## Warning Signs of Unsafe Driving

If you suffer from any of these stroke side effects, then it can impair your ability to drive.

Here are some warning signs to look out for:

- Driving too fast or too slow for road conditions or posted speed
- Needing help or instructions from passengers
- Making slow or poor distance decisions
- Becoming easily frustrated or confused
- Getting lost frequently in familiar areas
- Having accidents or close calls
- Drifting unintentionally across lane markings

If you or a loved one are experiencing any of these warning signs while driving after stroke, then **stop driving immediately** as you can cause serious harm to yourself or others on the road.

Then be sure to consult with your occupational therapist or certified driver rehabilitation specialist (<http://www.aded.net/>) for guidance.

## How to Drive Again After Stroke

If you have impairments that affect your ability to drive, then your doctor is required to report you to the DMV for your safety and the safety of others. Luckily, you can reinstate your license through a reexamination with the DMV. These reexaminations are in-person and may require both a written and behind-the-wheel test depending on what state you live in.

Every state has different requirements for reinstating your license after stroke, so check with your local DMV for more information.

# Checklist for Driving Again After Stroke

The process of getting your license back after stroke can feel overwhelming, so take it one step at a time.

Here's a checklist to help guide you:

1. Consult with your occupational therapist to discuss if you need a driving reexamination
2. If so, then consider working with a **certified driver rehabilitation specialist**
3. Work on improving your stroke side effects until you feel confident to drive safely again (i.e. arm movement, multitasking, decision making)
4. Contact your local DMV and ask what their requirements are for reinstating your license after stroke.
5. Schedule any necessary tests with the DMV

Step 3 will take the longest, but it will be worth it for the sake of your safety and others'.

Some stroke survivors get their licenses back after their first try, others have to take the test several times before passing. And unfortunately, some stroke survivors don't get their license back at all. Your chances of success are higher if your stroke side effects were minor OR if you work really hard to improve severe impairments.

## Adapting Your Car for Driving After Stroke

Many stroke survivors benefit from adapting their car after stroke. There are a variety of tools available that can help make driving easier by adapting your car to your impairments. These adaptations can be very useful "**compensation techniques**" – 6/20/2016.

Some examples of car adaptations are:

- **Spinner wheels**, which attach to your steering wheel for one-handed steering
- **Left-foot accelerators**, for those with right side impairments
- **Swivel seats**, that help you get in and out of the car

There many more ways to adapt your car for driving after stroke. If you're interested, talk to your occupational therapist about car adaptations that are right for you.

## Driving After Stroke Is Possible

Overall, getting your license back after stroke is possible with the right preparation and planning; and, of course, with the right rehabilitation.

We strongly encourage you to consult with your occupational therapist who has plenty of experience helping other stroke survivors get back behind the wheel. Passing the test will require hard work, but we know you're up for the task!