

Driving after Stroke: What You Must Know

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Sometimes the side effects of a stroke can impair your ability to drive. The good news is that 80% of stroke survivors will work their way back to driving safely again. Here's a comprehensive guide on how to get there.

Warning Signs

First, evaluate your warning signs. This will help you determine if you can drive safely right now or if you need to do some training first. Here are some warning signs of unsafe driving:

- 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've experienced any of these signs while driving after stroke, then you aren't ready to drive yet. And if you can't attempt driving but want to know if you'll be able to do so safely, you can ask friends and family members if they've seen a change in your communication, thinking, judgement, or behavior. Those who observe you frequently can provide a good outside opinion.

Driving Evaluations

To properly determine if you're able to drive again, you need to participate in a driver evaluation. During this evaluation, a trained professional can help you determine your readiness and, if you're not ready, help train you to do so.

A driver's evaluation will usually include:

- Assessment of functional availability
- Reaction time testing
- Visual testing
- Perceptual testing
- In-car testing

To find a qualified driver education training program, ask your doctor or occupational therapist for a recommendation; or you can search for a driver specialist on the AOTA website (<http://www.aota.org/olderdriver>).

Driving Adaptations

Some physical impairments can be temporarily solved with the use of assistive devices or car adaptations. For example, if you can only use one hand, a spinner knob can be attached to the steering wheel to enable steering with one hand. Also, if your right side is impaired, then a left gas pedal and spinner knob can be installed on your car.

Wheelchair-Loading

There are also adaptive solutions for stroke survivors in wheelchairs. The **National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association** (<http://www.nmedia.com>) is a great resource for adaptive transportation that can help you reclaim independence behind the wheel. Choosing a modified vehicle is a big decision, so be sure to do extensive research before investing.

With the help of trained specialists and adaptive equipment, driving after stroke is a possibility that many stroke survivors can successfully work towards.