

Recovery after Stroke: Driving

Driving is often a major concern after a stroke. It's not unusual for stroke survivors to want to drive. Getting around after a stroke is important – but safely is even more important.

Can I drive after a stroke?

Injury to the brain may change how you do things. Many people who have had a stroke develop some type of cognitive change. This may include problems with memory, judgment, problem-solving or a combination of these. So before you drive again, think carefully about how these changes may affect safety for you, your family and others.

What are some warning signs of unsafe driving?

Often survivors are unaware of the difficulties in driving they might have. Some may not realize all of the effects of their stroke. They may feel that they're able to drive even 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 to notify your State Department of Motor Vehicles that you've been advised not to drive.

If you or someone you know has experienced some of these warning signs of unsafe driving, please consider taking a driving test:

- 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. They will offer a professional opinion about how your stroke might change your ability to drive. Contact your State Department of Motor Vehicles. Ask for the Office of Driver Safety. Ask what applies to people who've had a stroke. Have your driving tested. Professionals such as driver rehabilitation specialists can evaluate your driving 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 rehab centers.

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

How can I learn more?

Call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) to learn more about stroke or find local support groups, or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

Sign up to get Stroke Connection magazine, a magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers at strokeconnection.org. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with stroke by joining our Support Network at strokeassociation.org/supportnetwork.



Baptist Health

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Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

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

FOR EXAMPLE:

When should I test my driving ability?

Is my driving restriction permanent?

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

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit strokeassociation.org/letstalkaboutstroke to learn more.

Baptist Health Rehabilitation Institute Driver Rehabilitation Program

The BHRI has a Driver Rehabilitation Program. It is a “behind the wheel” program for evaluating and training the disabled driver.

We offer services to both inpatients and outpatients.

Program services are provided by an occupational therapist who is also a driver rehabilitation specialist/certified driver educator. Specialized equipment includes a two door sedan and full size van. Both vehicles have hand controls, left foot gas pedal, torso support strap and various steering wheel adaptations. The van is also equipped with a wheelchair lift and six-way power seat.

Driver Rehabilitation sessions are typically one hour in length and incorporate a variety of driving situations and settings. Depending on the client's performance, settings may progress from parking lot, residential area, city traffic to freeway driving. Sessions may focus on the use of specialized equipment to compensate for physical limitations. Sessions may also focus on cognitive, perceptual, or judgment issues which influence the ability to drive safely. Recommendations are made as to whether the individual should continue driving, discontinue driving, receive further training, or obtain specialized equipment.

Driver Rehabilitation clients must have a doctor's order for evaluation and training and must have a valid drivers license or permit. Pre-driving screening includes assessment of visual skills, cognition, strength, range of motion, and the ability to enter/exit the care.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL:

501-202-7520 or 1-800-890-7011.