

Returning to driving after a stroke can be an important part of recovery. However, there are several reasons why someone may not be able to do so. This factsheet describes how stroke and transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs) can affect driving, the relevant procedures that should be followed, and lists organisations that can provide further advice and information.

How can a stroke affect driving?

A stroke can make it **unsafe to drive**, at least for a **temporary** period. Some of the **effects of stroke** that may have an impact on your ability to **drive safely** are described below:

Physical effects

Stroke can commonly cause **weakness** to your arm, leg or both. It can also cause other physical effects including **pain**, **changes** in **sensation** and excessive or involuntary **muscle contractions**. For further information, please see our factsheet *F33 Physical effects of stroke*.

Visual problems

Stroke can cause a variety of visual problems including **involuntary eye movements**, **double** or **blurred vision**, **reduced perception** of depth and **visual field loss**. Three out of ten stroke survivors will experience **hemianopia**, which means 'without half vision' and results in a **loss of sight** from **one side**. If you experience any kind of visual field loss you should be informed by the **medical professionals** of the effect this will have on driving. For

further information, please see our factsheet *F37 Visual problems after stroke*.

Cognitive effects

A stroke can cause a range of cognitive changes including problems with **attention**, **concentration**, **comprehension**, **problem solving**, **memory**, understanding **time** and place, **perception** of space and distance and **decision making**. Most stroke survivors will experience some degree of **cognitive loss** in the **early stages**. Ideally this should be **assessed** before returning to activities that may be affected by any changes, such as driving. For further information, please see factsheet *F7 Cognitive effects of stroke*.

Tiredness

Fatigue after stroke can **decrease** your capacity to perform **physical** and **mental activities**. This can impact on your **daily life**. For further information, see our factsheet *F18 Tiredness after stroke*.

Epilepsy

Some people experience a **seizure** at the **time of** their **stroke** or in the **following 24 hours** and some of these people may go on to develop **epilepsy**. Your ability to drive

could be affected if you experience a seizure at the wheel. For further information, please see factsheet *F24 Epilepsy and stroke*.

Driving uses a **combination of skills** and a stroke can affect your **ability to drive safely** in a number of ways. Some of these **changes** are **less obvious** than others, for example, a stroke could affect your ability to make quick decisions, react to sudden changes and concentrate on driving. There is also the **risk** of having **another stroke** to consider and the **risk** of a further stroke is **highest early** after a **stroke** or **transient ischaemic attack (TIA)**.

The driving rules

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 & Vehicle Agency (DVA)**, who use the same rules regarding medical fitness to drive as the DVLA.

The **DVLA** and **DVA** are responsible for all driving and vehicle related records and one of their main aims is to improve road safety. They are **legally responsible** for ensuring that drivers are **fit to drive**. However the onus is on the **driver** to **notify DVLA or DVA** of any **medical condition** which may affect their ability to drive safely. The DVLA employs a team of medical advisors and their **Drivers Medical Group** ensures drivers who have medical conditions meet the required medical standards and are safe to drive.

Drivers **must comply** with the **medical standards for drivers**. These standards have been written by a number of

government-appointed advisory panels who each have specialist knowledge of different medical conditions and disorders. The standards are regularly reviewed to ensure they are in line with current medical research and advancements in medical science.

After a stroke or TIA you must stop driving immediately, but in the majority of cases this is **temporary**. It is **possible** to **return** to driving after a stroke or TIA as long as it's **safe to do so** and correct **procedures** are **followed**. The DVLA produce an *At a Glance Guide to the Current Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive* outlining the **circumstances** in which people experiencing different medical conditions are **allowed to drive**. This guide also applies in Northern Ireland and medical practitioners may refer to these when advising people.

When can I drive after a stroke or a TIA?

Cars or motorcycles

The medical standards specify that **if you have a licence to drive a car or motorcycle (category B licence) you are not allowed to drive for at least one month after a stroke or TIA**. You may **resume** driving after this period if your doctor says you have made a **satisfactory recovery**.

If you experience **frequent TIAs** over a short period of time you may be required to have **three months free** of TIAs before resuming driving and you will 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 are **not allowed to drive** vehicles under this licence for **one year** and you will need to **inform the DVLA/DVA**. Following this you may be able to **return to driving**. This will depend again on how much **recovery** you make and also on medical **reports** and **tests**.

For **tractor** or **moped** drivers (with a category F or P licence), you will need to follow the **same rules** regarding when you can drive as car users (see page 2).

If you drive a **taxi** the local authority, or in London the public carriage office, will decide on the medical standards you must meet to return to driving. It's currently best practice for the same rules for drivers of **public carrying vehicles**, like buses, to be applied to taxi drivers.

If you drive a **police, ambulance** or **health service vehicle**, the individual police force, NHS trust, primary care trust or local health body may require you to meet additional medical standards.

Other rules

Epilepsy

If you develop epilepsy as a result of your stroke you will only be allowed to return to driving once you have been **free from fits** for a **set period of time**, commonly at least **one year**. You will usually be issued a **licence** for a **fixed period** of one, two or three years until you have been free from fits for seven years, at which time you may apply for a long term licence. The actual time period will depend on the **type of fits** – when they occurred,

whether you were awake or asleep, their frequency, whether you are taking any medication and whether you have any previous history of seizures. It will be **longer** if you drive a **large goods** or **public carrying vehicle**.

Carotid endarterectomy

20 per cent of strokes are caused by **narrowing** of the **carotid arteries** (the two main arteries in the neck supplying blood to the brain). The main **treatment** for this is a **carotid endarterectomy**. This is an operation to remove the lining of the artery. After this type of operation your **doctor** should **advise** you of when you are **safe** to return to driving. This is usually after two to three weeks, when you can **safely perform an emergency stop** and easily **look over your shoulder**. Please see our factsheet *F40 Carotid artery disease* for more information on this procedure.

Motor cortex stimulation (MCS)

Pain can be caused by stroke and about five per cent of stroke survivors will develop **central post stroke pain**. One **treatment** which can reduce this, and other pain that results from problems with signals from the nerves, is an **implanted motor cortex stimulator** (MCS). This involves surgically implanting a stimulator into the brain or spinal cord. There is a **risk of seizures associated with MCS** and the DVLA guidelines state that if someone has a MCS and the pain is caused by stroke, the person **must not drive** a car or motorcycle for **one year**. Returning to driving after this period will depend on other lasting effects of the stroke.

Do I need to notify the DVLA/DVA?

During the **first month** following your **stroke** or a **single TIA**, although you are not allowed to drive, **you are not required to notify the DVLA/DVA**.

You **must notify** the **DVLA/DVA** though, 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 attack**, other than ones within the first 24 hours following the stroke
- treatment for your stroke 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 hold a current **Large Goods Vehicle (LGV)** or **Public Carrying Vehicle (PCV) licence**.

One month after your stroke you will need to **notify** the **DVLA/DVA** if you have any **ongoing effects** from your stroke – in particular visual field loss, cognitive problems or impaired limb function.

If you **only** experience **minor limb weakness** and have no other neurological problems you will **not necessarily** be required 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 disability, in which case you may be issued a restricted licence.

If you are **unsure** of any of the above points or whether you are safe to drive you should **discuss this further with your doctor**.

If you are **admitted to hospital** following a stroke or TIA, before being discharged you should be **asked** whether you **drive** or wish to in the future. If this is the case the **medical team** should consider your capacity to drive safely and provide you with relevant **advice** in line with the DVLA/DVA regulations. If you did not stay in hospital or have been **discharged**, you should **speak to your GP**. Your doctor may contact the DVLA's medical advisors for advice when making a decision.

How do I notify the DVLA/DVA?

Stage 1

First you need to **complete a medical questionnaire** and send this to the **DVLA Drivers Medical Group**. Or if you live in the Northern Ireland, the **DVA Medical Section**. You can **request a form** from the DVLA/DVA or you can **download** the DVLA forms from the motoring section of the Government's website www.direct.gov.uk and the DVA forms from www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring.

Stage 2

If possible the DVLA/DVA will make a decision using the information provided. If the DVLA/DVA **require more information** they may do the following:

- With your permission **contact your GP or consultant** for further information.
- Arrange for you to be **examined by a medical officer** or specialist in your local area.
- Ask you to take a **driving assessment, eyesight test** and/or **driving test**.

Stage 3

Once all the **relevant information** is **received** by the DVLA/DVA a **decision** will be made regarding your driving licence by the **medical advisor**.

The DVLA/DVA may make one of the following decisions:

- You may be able to **keep** your licence or be issued a **new** one.
- You may be issued a **licence** for a **fixed period** of one, two or three years, after which your medical fitness will be reviewed.
- You may be issued a **licence** that requires you to drive a vehicle with **specialist controls**.
- Your **license** may be **revoked** (taken away). If this is the case the **reasons** this decision was made should be **explained**. You should be told, if applicable, **when you can reapply** and you should receive a notice explaining how you can **appeal** the decision.

How long will the DVLA/DVA take to make a decision?

If a decision can be made with the information provided in your questionnaire the DVLA will aim to make a **decision** within **15 working days**. If the DVA are the ones making the decision, they 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 DVLA will aim to make a **decision** within **90 working days**.

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

If you do not inform the **DVLA** or **DVA** of a **medical condition** where their **guidelines** state you should this may be classed as a **criminal offence** and you could be **fined** and **lose** your **license**.

Do I need to notify my insurance company?

Before you return to **driving** you should **inform** your **insurance company**, otherwise they may refuse to pay out on any claim made. **Medical conditions may affect** your **premium**, so you may wish to shop around for a better quote. Even if after one month your doctor confirms you are safe to return to driving, your **insurance company may request** that you **inform** the **DVLA/DVA** and they may not be able to provide you with cover unless they gain official confirmation that you are safe to drive. Insurance companies all have their **own procedures** and you should **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 present you can either **voluntarily surrender** your licence or **inform** the **DVLA/DVA** and let them make a decision about your licence.

If you choose to **surrender** your license there will be no need for further medical enquiries to be made. If at a **later point** you feel you have made a satisfactory recovery and would like to **apply** for your licence to

be **restored** further medical enquiries may be made then.

Returning to the wheel

Before returning to driving you may find it helpful to first have a few **refresher lessons** with a qualified driving instructor. You can find driving **instructors** in your area by looking in your local **phonebook**. You can verify the legitimacy of an instructor by **checking** 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 you. **Mobility centres** can also provide **advice** and **tuition** to those returning to driving.

If you currently drive a manual car you may wish to **consider switching** to an **automatic**, preferably with some tuition from an instructor to help with the transition, as these vehicles **can be easier** to drive.

The Blue Badge Scheme

The Blue Badge Scheme provides **parking concessions** for **drivers** and **passengers** who have **severe mobility problems** and find it difficult to use 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. You can find out whether you are **eligible** for a badge, **how to apply** and **more details** about the scheme by contacting your **local authority**. The **Department for Transport** also produces a number of useful booklets about the scheme.

Specially adapted cars

If your stroke caused **physical disabilities** it can still be **possible** for you to **return to driving**. There are a **range** of **vehicle adaptations** and **motoring accessories** which can make driving **possible** and more **comfortable**. The increased sophistication and variety of these is enabling drivers with a wide range of disabilities to drive.

Specialist mobility centres can carry out **assessments** and provide **information** and **advice** on the **adaptations** you may **require** to be made to your vehicle, to enable you to return to driving with a physical impairment. They can also provide **assessments** for **passengers with disabilities** and **information** on how to get **wheelchairs** in and out of a car. These **centres** can be found in locations all around the country. (see the 'Useful organisations' list at the end of this factsheet.)

Concerns about the safety of others

A stroke can cause **impairments of judgment** and **anosognosia** (a condition where a person is **unaware** of their **disability**). In severe cases the stroke survivor may **deny their own limitations**. If a person has been driving for many years it can be hard to suddenly stop and they may need **support and guidance** from others. **Family members** may need to **remind** a person they must not drive, and of the **risks** of driving, the potential for **accidents** and the **legal implications**. A person may need support to find **alternative transport**. It may also help to point out money could be saved by selling a redundant vehicle if this is an option. If you **do not think a family**

member is safe to drive it is important you discuss this with them or their **GP**.

What should I do if I am unable to return to driving?

Not being able to drive can have a significant **impact** on **everyday life**. For many, being able to drive is something they depend on and a pleasurable activity. Stroke survivors and their carers may need to rely more on **public transport**. A person may feel they have **lost their independence** and they may require the **help** from others to **get out** and about, particularly if they live in a rural area where public transport is less readily available. The lack of independence and social contact may **lower** a person's **self esteem** and have an **emotional impact**, making them feel angry, frustrated or low. For further information see our factsheet *F10, Psychological effects of stroke*.

Finding **other ways to cope**, including alternative ways to get out and about, is a key stage of the recovery process. There are **schemes** to help 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 from **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** around

the country which provide **bookable, wheelchair accessible transport**.

The **Access to Work Scheme**, delivered by the **Job Centre Plus**, can help people with the **cost** of getting to and from work if they are unable to use public transport due to their disability.

If you can **travel by train**, you may be entitled to a **Disabled Person's Railcard**, which entitles you to a third off the **cost** of most **rail fares** in **England, Scotland** and **Wales**. In **Northern Ireland**, if you are claiming **Disability Living Allowance** you are entitled to a **half fare SmartPass** for concessionary bus and train travel – for more information, contact **Translink** (see 'Useful organisations').

If you can **travel by bus**, you may be entitled to a **free bus pass** if you are **eligible**, 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** or **Wales**, contact your **local council** for more information. In **Scotland**, contact **Transport Scotland** to apply for your National Entitlement Card (see 'Useful organisations'). For **Northern Ireland**, you may be entitled to the **SmartPass** (see above).

Many towns and shopping centres also offer **Shopmobility schemes** which hire out **manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs** and **powered scooters** to anyone who needs help with mobility.

Useful organisations

All organisations listed are UK wide unless otherwise stated.

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

Drivers Medical Group, DVLA,
Swansea, SA99 1TU
Tel: 0300 790 6806

Website: www.dvla.gov.uk

Email: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk

Produce a *Customer Service Guide for Drivers with Medical Conditions* and an *At a Glance Guide to the Current Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive*.

Driver and Vehicle Agency (Northern Ireland)

DVA Medical Section, Driver Licensing,
County Hall, Castlerock Road, Coleraine,
BT51 3TB

Tel: 0845 402 4000

Website: www.dvlni.gov.uk

Email: dvlni@doeni.gov.uk

The sole driver, vehicle and vehicle operator licensing authority in Northern Ireland.

Directgov website

www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

The Government's website provides information about all aspects of motoring, including how to tell the DVLA about a medical condition. Download the relevant DVLA guidance, medical questionnaires for notifying the DVLA of a medical condition and *A Guide to Driving Ordinary Vehicles (Group 1) Following a Stroke, TIA, Mini-stroke, Cerebral Thrombosis or Amaurosis Fugax*.

Nidirect website

www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring

Brings together lots of information about motoring from government departments and agencies in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Transport (DfT) Blue Badge Scheme

Tel: 020 7944 4906

Blue Badge Helpline: 0161 367 0009

Email: blue.badge@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/bluebadge

The DfT produce some useful guides in paper, Braille and audio formats including *How can I get a Blue Badge*.

Disabled Motorists Federation

Tel: 0191 416 3172

Website: www.dmfed.org.uk

Email: enquiries@dmfed.org.uk

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

Ford Mobility

Unit 2 Wintersells Road, Byfleet,
Surrey, KT14 7LF

Tel: 0845 604 0019

Website: www.ford.co.uk/mobility

Email: info@mobility.co.uk

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

Forum of Mobility Centres

c/o Providence Chapel, Warehorne, Ashford,
Kent TN26 2JX

Tel: 0800 559 3636

Website: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Email: mobility@rcht.cornwall.nhs.uk

Contact the forum to find out where your nearest mobility centre is located and for more information about the services that the centres provide.

Mobilise

Ashwellthorpe, Norwich NR16 1EX

Tel: 01508 489449

Website: www.mobilise.info

Email: enquiries@mobilise.info

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

Motability

City Gate House, 22 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HB

Tel: 0845 456 4566

Text phone: 0845 6750009

Website: www.motability.co.uk

The Motability scheme enables people with disabilities to obtain cars, powered wheelchairs or scooters, using government funded mobility allowances.

National Association for Bikers with a Disability

Unit 20, The Bridgewater Centre, Robson Avenue, Urmston, Manchester, M41 7TE

Tel: 0844 415 4849

Website: www.nabd.org.uk

Email: office@thenabd.org.uk

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

Ricability (the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs)

Unit G03, The Wenlock Business Centre, 50–52 Wharf Road, London N1 7EU

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Text phone: 020 74272469

Website: www.ricability.org.uk

Email: mail@ricability.org.uk

An independent consumer research charity providing 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 *The Ins and Outs of Choosing a Car*, *Car Controls*, *Getting a Wheelchair into a Car*, and *People Lifters*.

A2B

Website: www.a2binfo.net

A2B is a project bringing together a range of community transport services and you can search their website for schemes in England.

Disabled Person's Railcard

Rail Travel Made Easy, PO Box 11631, Laurencekirk AB30 9AA

Tel: 0845 605 0525

Website: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

The Railcard offers a third off rail fares across the UK for eligible people.

Translink

Tel: 0845 600 0049

Website: www.translink.co.uk

Runs a concessionary travel scheme for older people and those claiming Disability Living Allowance in Northern Ireland.

Transport Scotland

Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow G4 0HF

Tel: 0141 272 7100

Website: www.transportscotland.gov.uk

Email: info@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk

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

National Federation of Shopmobility UK

PO Box 6641, Christchurch, BH23 9DQ

Tel: 08456 442 446

Website: www.shopmobilityuk.org

Email: Info@shopmobilityuk.org

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

Transport for London (TfL)

Tel: 0843 222 1234 (24 hours a day)

Text phone: 020 7918 3015

Email: travinfo@tfl.gov.uk

Website: www.tfl.gov.uk

TfL provide 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 *Guide Around London – Your Guide to Accessibility*.

British Insurance Brokers' Association

8th Floor John Stow House, 18 Bevis Marks, London, EC3A 7JB

Consumer Helpline: 0870 950 1790

Website: www.biba.org.uk

Email: enquiries@biba.org.uk

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

Disclaimer: The Stroke Association provides the details of other organisations for information only. Inclusion in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement.

Glossary of terms

DSA = Driving Standards Agency

DVLA = Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

DVA = Driver and Vehicle Agency
(in Northern Ireland)

LGV = Large Goods Vehicle (formally known as HGV)

PCV = Passenger Carrying Vehicle (formally known as a PSV)

TIA = Transient Ischaemic Attack

For further information, phone the Stroke Helpline on 0303 3033 100, email info@stroke.org.uk or visit our website www.stroke.org.uk
If you are unhappy about any aspect of The Stroke Association, please make your views known to us immediately. We will happily discuss any issues and how they can best be resolved.

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For sources used, visit www.stroke.org.uk/information/our_publications

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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

