



Driving after Stroke

Driving is an important part of many people's lives. When a person is no longer able to drive, it can greatly affect the individual's life. Work, social activities and daily movement in the community may all be affected. Often, people who have had a Stroke wish to resume driving. It is an important step in re-establishing independence in daily activities.

Driving is a complex task requiring integration of visual, mental and physical capacities. After a Stroke, the ability to drive safely can be impaired. Physical weakness, altered sensation, reduced speed in responding to information, problems with memory and concentration, damage to vision, reduced reaction time, difficulties with reading and other consequences of a Stroke will affect driving ability.

Many people will be able to return safely to driving following a Stroke. However, considering the seriousness of the decision to resume driving, an assessment will be required to make sure the person who had a Stroke is able to drive safely. Someone who would be putting themselves or other road-users at risk if they continued to drive, will not be able to resume driving. According to the Austroads Guidelines (2003), you should not drive for at least 1 month after a Stroke and return to driving depends upon your doctor's assessment. This is to allow time to recover from the Stroke and for your condition to stabilise. Some people may require a longer period and specialist assessment before they resume driving.

What You Should Do Before Resuming Driving

When you feel you are ready to resume driving you should:

1. Consult your rehabilitation specialist or local doctor and be guided by his or her advice. A medical report for driving needs to be completed and sent to the RTA. When making the assessment, the doctor will consider the stability of your condition and any likelihood of a recurrence.
2. Inform the RTA (Roads & Traffic Authority) of your medical condition.
3. Inform your insurance company of your medical condition to ensure that you are adequately covered in the case of an accident.
4. You may require a review by an eye specialist to assess any visual damage resulting from the Stroke.

PLEASE TURN OVER



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5. If you have any problems in function following the Stroke, it is recommended that you undergo an assessment by an occupational therapist trained in driver assessment and rehabilitation. A clinical examination by your doctor may not detect subtle problems which could affect your ability to drive. The driving assessment is not free but will include an off-road assessment and an on-road driving assessment. Following the assessment a report is written giving recommendations as to your fitness to drive and a rehabilitation plan for driving if it is appropriate.

Rehabilitation

If the assessor recommends rehabilitation, this may include:

- Advice about appropriate vehicle modifications.
- A program of lessons to enable you to develop driving skills and regain confidence in driving.
- Referral to other health professionals (eg, ophthalmologist, psychologist).

Cancellation of your license

Cancellation or suspension of your license may occur if the deficits caused by your Stroke make driving dangerous for you and other road users. This can be reviewed if your function improves. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your assessment, you have the right to seek a second opinion and you can appeal to the local court.

If you wish to have a driving assessment, please contact OT Australia NSW to obtain a list of service providers.

OT Australia NSW

Unit 20 / 13 Avenue of Americas
Newington NSW 2112
Ph: 9648 3225

Acknowledgements:

Australian Brain Foundation (Victoria) Ltd. Pamphlet for driving after a Stroke. Neurocare Australia .

AUSTROADS (2003) 3rd Edition. Assessing fitness to drive: Guidelines and Standards for Health Professionals in Australia. Austroads INC: Sydney.