

Driving After a Stroke in Ontario

OUR THANKS TO THE STROKE NETWORK OF SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO FOR THIS RESOURCE WHICH HAS BEEN ADAPTED FOR THE RESIDENTS OF SOUTHEASTERN ONTARIO

INFORMATION FOR THE STROKE SURVIVOR AND FAMILY

Driving is a means of independence that is important to many people. A stroke can cause changes that make it unsafe to drive (see **Appendix A**). About half of those who have had a stroke will return to driving¹. It is important to remember that people recover from a stroke at different rates.

Key Points

- You are not to drive for at least one month after your stroke **and** you need to wait until your doctor/nurse practitioner says you are safe.
- After one month you **may** be able to drive again, as long as your doctor/nurse practitioner agrees it is safe for you to do so.
- Your healthcare team must assess your readiness to drive **before** you resume driving. Your doctor/nurse practitioner's decision will be informed by your healthcare team's assessment results.
- It is the doctor's discretion to inform the Ministry if you have significant changes that would affect your ability to drive.
- **It is illegal to drive with a suspended license.**
- If you choose to drive without medical clearance or with a suspended license, your insurance may not protect you after an accident.

Can you drive one month after having a stroke in Ontario?

In Ontario, your doctor/nurse practitioner **may** report to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) that you have had a stroke. This is because it might be dangerous for you to drive a vehicle (such as a car, truck, tractor, etc.).

The rules in Ontario are:

- Your doctor/nurse practitioner must assess your readiness to drive.
- Your readiness to drive must be re-evaluated after the one month period.

If the doctor/nurse practitioner is unsure whether you are ready to drive, he or she may tell you to go to a special driving centre for more tests.

It is illegal to drive with a suspended licence.

What is everyone's responsibility?

Stroke Survivor:

- Ask your doctor/nurse practitioner or hospital occupational therapist if your licence has been reported to the ministry.
- Not to drive until you have been told by your doctor/nurse practitioner that it is safe to do so, even if your licence has not been suspended.
- Talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner and health care team about driving if you have any questions.
- Ask your doctor/nurse practitioner if you need to have your vision checked.
- Check the status of your licence if you are unsure whether it has been suspended (see phone number later in document).

Doctor/Nurse Practitioner:

- Assesses your readiness to return to driving based on tests and reports from the healthcare team.
- Sends required reports to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

Occupational Therapist (OT):

- Completes pre-driving screening tests to assess whether the stroke has impacted parts of the brain that are used for driving.
- Meets with you to discuss your recovery goals following your stroke. Your OT will want to hear about your progress at home, how you're managing your daily activities, and whether you have noticed any changes or challenges since your stroke.
- You may be asked to complete some pen-and-paper assessments and functional tasks. All of these are intended to assess the cognitive and perceptual skills needed to drive safely.
- Your Pre-Driving Assessment may be completed in one session or may take place over multiple sessions, depending on your rehabilitation needs.
- Your Occupational Therapist will send all assessment findings to your family doctor, who will make the final decision regarding your return to driving. If the results are inconclusive, your OT may suggest an on-road driving assessment to further inform your doctor's decision.
- Shares assessment results with you and your doctor/nurse practitioner.
- May send information to the MTO

Cognition is your thinking skills (e.g., problem-solving, judgement, attention, memory and reaction time).

Perception is your brain's awareness of the messages it's receiving from your body.

Please note that vision is different from perception. Vision is **what** your eyes can see. Perception is **how your brain understands** what your eyes (and other body parts) are telling it. Your Pre-Driving Assessment does not include a vision assessment. *If you are having vision changes or challenges, you may be required to pursue further vision testing with your optometrist/ophthalmologist.*

Ministry of Transportation (MTO)

- Reviews doctor/nurse practitioner/occupational therapist report and decide whether to suspend your driver's licence.
- Notifies you of the decision about your driver's licence.
- Lets you know what to do next.

Family Members/Caregivers:

- Support and provide reminders and guidance to you when you can no longer drive because of potential risk to yourself and others.
- Discuss with your doctor/nurse practitioner if it is felt that you are not safe to drive.

When should you be tested for driving?

This should be decided on an individual basis. You will need to discuss this with your occupational therapist, doctor/nurse practitioner, or both. The timing is different for everyone. This is because stroke affects everyone differently.

It may be suggested that you wait before any testing is done to allow for more stroke recovery and a chance at better test results.

Your doctor/nurse practitioner or occupational therapist can help you decide when you are ready.

Your occupational therapist may do **pre-driving** screenings (pencil and paper and/or physical tests) that will help decide if you are ready to take the on-road test or if you need more time, training, or testing. See Appendix A for *Changes from My Stroke that Can Impact Driving*.

What is the process for getting your licence back?

When your licence has not been suspended:

Your doctor/nurse practitioner must agree that you are safe to resume driving before you return to driving any vehicle. You may be told to wait longer than a month before returning to driving. You may also be asked to complete a formal driving assessment. Your doctor/nurse practitioner may be required to send a form into the Ministry of Transportation (MTO). (see also **Appendix B** Return to Driving when Licence is Not Suspended – Aphasia Friendly Version)

When your licence has been suspended:

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) or your doctor/nurse practitioner may require your driving skills to be tested. This is called a functional (driving) assessment and may include:

- An in-office test
- An on-road driving test
- A vision test

The letter you receive from the MTO will explain what to do next, and will link you to the Ministry of Transportation approved functional (driving) assessment centres. (see also **Appendix C** Return to Driving After a Licence Suspension – Aphasia Friendly Version)



Ministry Approved Functional (Driving) Assessment Centres:

Belleville

CBI Early Treatment Centre - Belleville Physiotherapy

81 Millennium Parkway, Suite 4

Belleville, Ontario, K8N 4Z5

Telephone number 613-967-9675

Toll free number: 1-800-558-4599

Fax number: 613-967-9604

Email: bellevillephysiotherapy@cbi.ca

Web: www.cbi.ca

Services offered: Medical Assessments

Kingston

DAC Medical-Vision

11-400 Elliot Avenue

Kingston, Ontario, K7K 6M9

Telephone number: 613-544-0034

Fax number: 613-224-0270 (Ottawa)

Email: support@dacmedicalvision.org

Web: www.dacmedicalvision.org

Services offered: Medical Assessments, Vision Waiver Assessments

St. Elizabeth's Healthcare

Driver Assessment & Training including DriveABLE

1471 John Counter Blvd, Suite 410

Kingston, Ontario, K7M 8S8

Telephone number: 416-398-1035

Toll free number: 1-877-397-1035

Fax number: 416-398-3206

Email: driverinfo@saintelizabeth.com

Web: www.saintelizabeth.com

Services offered: Medical Assessments



Smiths Falls

DAC Medical – Vision

1F - 275 Brockville Street

Smiths Falls, Ontario, K7A 4Z6

Telephone number: 613-283-1980

Fax number: 613-224-0270 (**Ottawa**)

Email: support@dacmedicalvision.org

Web: www.dacmedicalvision.org

Services offered: Medical Assessments, Vision waiver Assessments

Peterborough

Drive On! Comprehensive Driver Rehabilitation

1135 Lansdowne St. West, Suite 240

Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 7M2

Telephone number: 705-742-4708

Fax number: 1-866-846-6933

Email: tstone@driveonrehab.com

Web: www.driveonrehab.com

Services offered: Medical Assessments, Vision Waiver Assessments

For **additional locations**, visit the Ministry of Ontario Approved Functional Assessment Centres for Drivers at

<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/functional-assessment-centres.shtml>

OR

The South East Healthline at

<https://www.southeasthealthline.ca/search/SearchResult.aspx?q=driver%20assessment&start=0>

**Ask the doctor/nurse practitioner or occupational therapist about
Ministry of Transportation Approved Functional (Driving)
Assessment Centres in your area.**

What happens during a driving assessment?

There are two parts to a **formal** functional (driving) assessment:

Part One: Pre-road tests

- Typically, the occupational therapist will do these tests with you at the Ministry approved functional (driving) assessment centre.
- The tests will look at your vision, judgment, thinking and physical skills (strength, sensation, reaction time, and arm, leg & neck movement).
- These tests will show whether you are ready for the on-road test, if you need more practice, or if you should think about different options.

Part Two: On-road test

- This test will be done in a car with a Certified Driving Instructor and the occupational therapist.
- They will look at your driving skills, such as safety, following directions, and your physical ability to drive a vehicle.
- You will have to cover the cost, which is about \$500 to \$800. This is why it is important to wait until you are ready.

A referral for the functional (driving) assessment must come from a doctor/nurse practitioner, or it may be required by the MTO as stipulated in your letter.

What are the possible results from the functional (driving) assessment?

1. You can return to driving.
2. With changes made to your car, you may be able to return to driving.
3. It is too soon to return to driving. You need driver's rehabilitation. After practicing or learning new ways to drive, you may return for another assessment to see if you are ready to return to driving.
4. You are not able to return to driving.



Drive Test Centres

To find a Drive Test Centre near you, visit https://drivetest.ca/find-a-drive-test-centre/find_a_drivetest_centre.html#/locations

What if you are no longer able to drive?

This may be a very hard time for you and your family. It is normal to feel upset, angry or have a sense of loss. It may be hard to accept this decision, but there are other options for you **in the community**.

Ask your occupational therapist, or other health care provider, about resources in your community that can help you get to places that you need to go.

The Healthline is an online service to help people find programs in the community to meet their needs. These programs include transportation support but also assistance with grocery shopping, meal delivery services, medication delivery services, etc. You can access the Healthline for your community at www.southeasthealthline.ca See **Appendix D** for additional supports and services.

You may also be eligible for an accessible parking permit that your occupational therapist (or other health care team member) can help you complete.

You can also call 211 to get information on Ontario's community, social, health-related and government services in my local area.

How can you find out about the status of your licence and file?

Call the Medical Review Section of the Ministry of Transportation: **416-235-1773** or toll-free at **1-800-268-1481**

You can also read more about the medical review process online at:

<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/medical-review-drivers.shtml>

If you do not agree with the final decision of the MTO, you can appeal the decision. More information about how to appeal will be included in their letter.



Notes:

Information is adapted from, *Driving after a stroke - information for patients and their families* (© 2011) with permission from Hamilton Health Sciences, Hamilton ON Canada.

Appendix A

Changes from Your Stroke that Can Impact Driving

A stroke can cause some short-term or long-term changes that can impact your ability to drive. These need to be tested to show whether they affect your driving safety. The following are areas that may impact your driving safety:

Movement Problems

- Weakness and fatigue
- Poor coordination and limited movement in your arms, legs, and neck
- Limited sensation, such as difficulty feeling the steering wheel with your hands or feeling the gas pedal with your feet

Visual Problems

- Changes in ability to see clearly or in focus
- Changes in field of vision, or what you are able to see without moving your head

Hearing Loss

- Changing in hearing may affect your ability to drive

Speech/Language Problems

- Ability to ask for help or directions
- Ability to read signs

Visual-perceptual and Cognitive Problems

- Visual neglect (that is, a “blind side” that your brain forgets is there)
- Changes in your ability to concentrate or pay attention
- Changes in your decision-making speed
- Longer reaction time
- Impulsive behaviour (that is, acting too quickly without thought or planning)
- Your body moving in ways that your don’t expect or plan (also known as motor planning problems or apraxia)
- Changes in your judgement
- Changes in your memory

Seizures

- You need to be seizure-free for a minimum of one year prior to being considered to drive again.
- Your doctor or nurse practitioner will determine if driving can be considered.

You can access a free screening tool developed by American Automobile Association to help measure how visual, mental and physical conditions might impact your safety as a driver. This tool can be accessed at:


<https://www.aaafoundation.org/roadwise-review-online>


Appendix B


Appendix B: Return to Driving When Licence is Not Suspended (Aphasia-Friendly)





I need to **see my doctor** 

after 

30 days 



I can drive 

I need more time $>$ 



not driving  **or**

a formal test 


Appendix C



Appendix C: Return to Driving After A Licence Suspension (Aphasia-Friendly)



Letter  from **MTO** 

that indicates I **have to do 1 or more:**

Written test 

Driving test  **Vision test** 



I will not drive




I need a formal test 



Pass driving test

✓ 

and drive again 



Do NOT pass driving test

✗ 

I require driving lessons



Appendix D

Southeastern Ontario Driving Resources

DAC Medical Vision

Offers driver assessments and training.

Email: support@dacmedicalvision.org

Website: www.dacmedicalvision.org

Kingston Location

3-400 Elliott Ave

Kingston, ON K7L 1A1

Tel: 613-544-0034

Smiths Falls Location

1F-275 Brockville St.

Smiths Falls, ON K7A 4Z6

Tel: 613-283-1980

Cornwall Location

1200 Second St. W.

Cornwall, ON K6J 1J3

Tel: 613-224-7480 (Ottawa)

St. Elizabeth's Healthcare

Offers driver assessments and training.

Email: driverinfo@saintelizabeth.com

Website: www.saintelizabeth.com

Kingston Location

1471 John Counter Blvd, Suite 410

Kingston, Ontario, K7M 8S8

Tel: 416-398-1035

Toll free number: 1-877-397-1035



Lifemark

Offers medical (including vision) assessments.

Email: kingstonphysio@lifemark.ca

Website: www.lifemark.ca

Kingston Location

790 Blackburn Mews, Unit 12

Kingston, Ontario, K7P 2N6

Tel: 613-389-2350

Toll free number: 1-888-997-2298

CBI Early Treatment Centre - Belleville Physiotherapy

Offers medical assessments.

Email: bellevillephysiotherapy@cbi.ca

Website: www.cbi.ca

Belleville Location

81 Millennium Parkway, Suite 4

Belleville, Ontario, K8N 4Z5

Tel: 613-967-9675

Toll free number: 1-800-897-9640

Accessible Parking

To apply for an accessible parking permit, visit any Service Ontario location or you can apply online at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-accessible-parking-permit#section-1>

There are two parts to the application:

Part A is to be completed by the applicant

Part B is to be completed by a healthcare practitioner

Transportation Options

Find transportation options for your area by visiting the SouthEast Healthline or click on the link below:

<https://www.southeasthealthline.ca/search/SearchResult.aspx?q=Transportation&start=0>