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 driving\(^1\). 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-Driver 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-Driver’s 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  
OR  
The South East Healthline at  
https://www.southeasthealthline.ca/search/SearchResult.aspx?q=driver%20assessment&start=0

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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.
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 you 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: Return to Driving When Licence is Not Suspended (Aphasia-Friendly)

I had a stroke

My healthcare team

- Physiotherapist
- Doctor
- Speech-Language Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist

looked at my ability to drive

I still have my licence

I cannot drive

for 30 days

Month

S M T W T F S
I need to **see my doctor**

**after**

30 days

**I can drive**

**I need more time**

*not driving* or

*a formal test*
Appendix C: Return to Driving After A Licence Suspension (Aphasia-Friendly)

I had a stroke

My healthcare team
- Physiotherapist
- Doctor
- Speech - Language Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist

I looked at my ability to drive

My licence is suspended and I will receive a letter for my doctor to fill out

Need direction from the Ministry of Transportation (MTO)
Letter from MTO

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

- Written test
- Driving test
- Vision test

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**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