



Driving after Stroke or Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)



What do I need to know?

Canadian Stroke Best Practices and the Canadian Medical Association recommend that **after stroke** you **do not drive** for **at least one month**. Depending on your situation this timeframe could be longer.



The Ontario Ministry of Transportation states that **Doctors, Nurse Practitioners and Optometrists** are “**required by law to report** patients who have or appear to have certain high risk medical conditions, vision conditions and/or functional impairments.” **Your stroke or TIA may meet this criteria.**



After a **Stroke or TIA**, do **not drive** until you **are assessed and medically cleared** to drive by your Doctor or Nurse Practitioner.


If the **Ministry of Transportation** has been notified they will :

- provide **further instructions**
- **make the final decision** about returning to driving.



It is **illegal** to drive with a **suspended license**.

Speak to your **health care team** about driving and your specific situation.

If your Occupational Therapy assessment indicates it is not safe for you to drive, **your therapist may report** to the Ministry of Transportation.

What happens when the Ministry of Transportation is notified?


The Ministry of Transportation will review the information they received from your healthcare provider.

If more information is required, the Ministry of Transportation will send you a **Driver Medical Form** for your Doctor or Nurse Practitioner to complete.

The Ministry of Transportation will review all of this information. You will receive a **letter with their decision** about the status of your licence.

The Ministry of Transportation will let you know what **information** they need to consider your licence for **reinstatement**. They may ask for:

- **additional reports** from your doctor or specialist
- a **comprehensive driving assessment** completed at a **Functional Assessment Centre**. This may include a road test.

 There may be stricter standards for commercial drivers (examples buses, trucks, emergency vehicles).



Not being able to drive can be tough to accept, but it's important for your safety and the safety of others.

~Brian, living with stroke

You can **appeal the decision** to suspend your licence with the **Licence Appeal Tribunal**. There is a **cost**.



Follow these links for more information on:

- Ministry of Transportation Medical Review Process
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-review-ontario-drivers>
- Licence Appeal Tribunal <https://tribunalsontario.ca/lat/>

How does a stroke or TIA affect my ability to drive safely?

Initially after stroke or TIA you may be at **high risk** of having **another stroke or TIA** in the near future. This can be a **safety** risk when driving. A stroke or TIA can affect safe driving due to temporary or permanent **changes** in:



- judgement
- concentration
- attention
- hearing and vision
- memory
- insight
- sensation
- emotional control
- fatigue
- perception
- reaction time
- behaviour
- strength
- coordination
- communication



Sometimes **changes** in these areas may **not** be **obvious**.

Why am I feeling emotional about driving?



Driving is an **important** life role. For many people, it is linked to their identity and independence. Not being able to drive may cause you to **feel down, frustrated**, and even **angry**. **Talk** to your **healthcare team** and your **support** system (family, friends, stroke support group, etc.) about how you are **feeling**.



When I was told I couldn't drive it was hard on my mind. My family and friends were a big support. They helped get me places until I got my licence back. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

~Brian, living with stroke



I felt like less of a person when I couldn't drive. I felt like I lost a major part of my life. That was very hard.

~Denise, living with stroke

When will I be ready to drive again?

Recovery after a stroke or TIA is **different** for each person. The timing of when a person will be ready to return to driving will vary. In one study, about **30%** of people who were driving before their stroke, had **returned to driving** 6 months afterwards*. **Some people will not return to driving** because of lasting effects from their stroke that make driving unsafe.



Do not rush the return to driving process. **Be patient.** Allow yourself time to **recover** so that you give yourself the **best chance** at a safe return to driving.



Speak with your healthcare **team.** They can help you determine when you are ready and guide you through the return to driving process.



Even when you think you are ready you may not be. Daily life takes a lot more energy after your stroke. Take your time, get yourself better first. Set your goals and take it one step at a time.

~Lynn, living with stroke



It's very important that you wait until you have recovered. You need to be ready physically, mentally and emotionally to start driving again.

~Denise, living with stroke

* Reference: Aufman, E. L., Bland, M. D., Barco, P. P., Carr, D. B., & Lang, C. E. (2013). Predictors of return to driving after stroke. *American journal of physical medicine & rehabilitation*, 92(7), 627–634.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/PHM.0b013e318282bc0d>

What services are available to help while I am not able to drive?

There may be **services** available in your community to **help** you with **transportation, shopping or errands**. Ask your healthcare team for more information. You can also **call 211** or search for services on your local **healthline** (www.thehealthline.ca).



Specialized driver testing is available at a **Functional Assessment Centre**. The Ministry of Transportation **may require** you to complete this specialized testing. Your doctor may also refer you to this service.



The **Functional Assessment Centre** may recommend a **specialized driver training** program and/or **vehicle modifications**. A **Driver Rehabilitation Program** can provide this **specialized training** and identify any **specialized equipment** you may require.



You can **self-refer** to **specialized driver testing** at a Functional Assessment Centre and **specialized driver training** services. Your healthcare team can help you determine if these services will be helpful to you.



Functional Assessment Centre locations can be found at:

- Ministry of Transportation
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-review-ontario-drivers#section-5>
- Visit www.cesnstroke.ca. Search “Driving After Stroke and TIA Resources”.
Ask your healthcare team for a copy.

What are the costs associated with returning to driving?

OHIP **does not** cover the costs of:

- specialized driver **testing**
- specialized driver **training**
- vehicle **modifications**



Specialized driver **testing** at a Functional Assessment Centre can range from **\$500-\$850**. In some cases it may cost more. Specialized driver **training costs** can range from **\$100-150/per session**.



The **total costs** for **both** specialized **driver testing** and **training** can range from **\$500** to approximately **\$3000**. Vehicle **modification** and **equipment costs** are **extra**.

Costs can change. Contact your local **provider** for the most accurate fees.

Funding support may be **available** from agencies such as Extended Health Plans, March of Dimes, and Veterans Affairs Canada.



Find **local contact information** for the services mentioned above.

- Call 211 or visit your local healthline (www.thehealthline.ca).
- Visit www.cesnstroke.ca. Search Driving After Stroke and TIA Resources.
- Ask your healthcare team for a copy.
- Functional Assessment Centres
- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-review-ontario-drivers#section-5>

This resource was developed collaboratively with persons with stroke and health care providers from across the Central East Stroke Network.



The following information sources were reviewed in developing this resource:

- Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations www.strokebestpractices.ca
- Canadian Medical Association Driver's Guide <https://joulecma.ca/evidence/CMA-drivers-guide>
- Ontario Ministry of Transportation Medical Review <https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-review-ontario-drivers>
- Driving after stroke education materials developed by: Champlain Stroke Network, Hamilton Health Sciences Centre, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Stroke Engine, Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network, Toronto Stroke Networks, and West GTA Stroke Network.