



Driving After a Stroke in Northwestern Ontario

Information for you and your family

For many people, being able to drive is an important part of being and remaining independent. Your ability to drive depends on good vision, attention and physical abilities. A stroke can affect all of these skills making it unsafe to drive.

Can I continue to drive in Ontario after having a stroke?

A stroke can affect all the skills required to drive a vehicle safely. That is why anyone who has a stroke:

- May not drive any vehicle that requires a licence in Ontario for a minimum of one month after diagnosis; and
- Must wait until their Doctor or Nurse Practitioner (NP) says it is safe; and
- Must have a valid driver's licence or have their licence reinstated before driving again

What happens after the minimum one-month period has passed?

You must receive approval from your Doctor/NP and have a valid licence before you can drive again.

In Ontario, this requires, your Doctor/NP to assess and determine your readiness to drive. They may require you to attend a special driving centre for more tests before making a decision.

Did you know?

- In Ontario, all drivers must meet basic medical standards to operate a motor vehicle.
- Doctors and Nurse Practitioners (NP) are required to report patients to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) who have or appear to have certain high-risk medical conditions, vision conditions, or functional impairments.
- If your licence has been suspended by the MTO, you cannot drive until it has been reinstated.
- If you have a commercial driver's licence, there are additional standards that must be met before you can return to driving.

Working Together

What is Everyone's Responsibility?

You (Stroke Survivor)

To recover from your stroke and not drive until:

- You have been told by your Doctor or Nurse Practitioner (NP) that it is safe to do so; **and**
- You have a valid licence; **or**
- You have had your licence reinstated

If you have a question about your care or about driving, talk with a member of your care team.

- Find out from your Doctor/NP if you need to have your vision checked
- If you do not know if your licence has been suspended, ask a member of your care team or you can contact the Ministry of Transportation

Phone: toll free at 1-800-268-1481

Online: www.dlc.rus.mto.gov.on.ca/dlc

Doctor or Nurse Practitioner (NP)

- Assesses your readiness to return to driving based on test results and evaluation from your healthcare team
- Sends required reports to the MTO

Occupational Therapist (OT):

- Conducts screening tests, to determine if your stroke has affected the parts of your brain used for driving. Depending on the severity of your stroke, this may be done while you are in-hospital or after you go home and are seen in a therapy program. These tests will help decide if you are ready to take an in-car road test or if you need more time, training or testing
- Shares assessment results with you and your Doctor/NP
- May send information to the MTO

Ministry of Transportation (MTO)

- Reviews Doctor/NP/OT report(s) and determines whether to suspend your driver's licence
- Notifies you of the decision made about your driver's licence
- Lets you know what to do next

Social Worker

- Helps you access alternative transportation, for example Lift+
- Provides information about potential funding supports, and helps with applications
- Provides mental health support and counselling

Family & Care Partners

- Provide support, reminders and guidance to you about your care restrictions
- Be an active part of the Care Team, discuss your concerns about driving and ask questions



How a Stroke

Can affect your ability to drive

Movement & sensory problems

- Weakness and/or fatigue
- Poor coordination
- Limited movement in arms, legs and neck
- Limited sensation such as difficulty feeling the steering wheel with your hands or feeling the gas pedal with your foot
- Moving your body in ways you don't expect

Visual problems

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

Hearing loss

- Changes in hearing may affect your ability to drive safely

Speech/language problems

- Ability to ask for help or directions and/or ability to read signs

Visual-perceptual & cognitive problems

- Having a 'blind spot', or an area 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 (acting too quickly without thought or planning)
- Changes in your judgment, changes in your memory

Seizures

- If your stroke has caused one or more seizures, you will need to be seizure-free for at least six (6) months and pass an additional review and assessments. Your Doctor/NP will determine if driving can be considered



When should I be tested for driving?

This should be decided on an individual basis. You will need to discuss this with your OT, Doctor/NP, or both. The timing is different for everyone. This is because stroke affects everyone differently.

Your Doctor/NP or OT can help you decide when you are ready. They may suggest that you wait a while to allow for more recovery and a chance at better test results.

Returning to the Road

Are you ready to drive again?

If your licence has not been suspended

Your Doctor/NP 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.

If you are not medically able to drive, your Doctor/NP will be required to send a form into the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

If your licence has been suspended by the MTO

If your licence has been suspended, you will receive a notification letter from the Ministry of Transportation. It will explain the next steps required to having your licence reinstated.

If the MTO requires you to have assessments completed, they will need to be conducted at an MTO approved Functional Assessment Centre.

Assessments may include:

- written and physical tests
- road test
- vision test



A referral for the driving assessment must come from a Doctor/NP, or it may be required by the MTO as written in your letter.

Referral forms are available from Partners in Rehab - Driver Rehabilitation Clinic.

The only Ministry of Transportation approved Functional Assessment Centre in Northwestern Ontario is:

Partners in Rehab

Driver Rehabilitation Clinic

101-79 North Court Street
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7A 4T7

Call: 807-683-9500

Toll Free: 1-888-855-0772

e-mail: administration@partnersinrehab.ca

partnersinrehab.ca



Driving Assessments

Functional Assessment Centres

What happens during a formal driving assessment?

There are two parts to a formal driving assessment:

1. Evaluation of the mental and physical skills needed to drive
2. Evaluation of your ability to drive

An Occupational Therapist with the Functional Assessment Centre will evaluate your vision, judgment, thinking, and physical skills (strength, sensation, reaction time, and arm, leg, and neck movements). A friend or family member can accompany you to these appointments.

The results of these tests will reveal if you are ready to move on to the driving test or if you need more practice or time.

The driving test is conducted by a certified driving instructor along with the OT.

They will look at your ability to drive safely and follow directions as well as your physical ability to drive a vehicle. Friends and family members are not permitted to ride along.

Cost

Services provided by Functional Assessment Centres are not covered by OHIP.

To find out the current pricing, please contact Partners in Rehab at 1-888-855-0772.

Living Outside Thunder Bay

If you require a driving assessment and live outside of Thunder Bay, please inform Partners in Rehab when booking your appointment and they will try and accommodate individual requests for scheduling.

What are the possible outcomes from the driving assessments?

There are four possible outcomes:



- 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 may need driver training and a reassessment
- 4 You are not able to return to driving

What if I am 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.

Community Supports

The March of Dimes Canada – After Stroke program can offer ongoing support from an After Stroke Coordinator who will provide a personalized approach to identify your specific needs and goals related to your post stroke recovery. They can also provide information on a variety of resources in your community. For more information, call 1-888-540-6666 or email: afterstroke@marchofdimes.ca.

The Northwest Healthline is an online service to help people find community programs that meet their needs. These programs include transportation support and assistance with grocery shopping, meal delivery services, medication delivery services, accessible parking permits, etc. Find these resources at their website, www.northwesthealthline.ca.

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

How can I find out about the status of my licence and file?

Call the Medical Review Section of the MTO toll free at 1-800-268-1481.

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

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-review-ontario-drivers>

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:

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Stroke Network of Southwestern Ontario for this resource which has been adapted for the residents of Northwestern Ontario.



¹Saikaley, M. et al (2018). Community Reintegration (Chapter 19). In Teasell, R. et al (Eds.), Evidence based review of stroke rehabilitation (EBRSR) 19th Edition. Heart and Stroke Foundation - Canadian Partnership for Stroke Recovery. http://www.ebrsr.com/sites/default/files/ch19_v19_2.pdf.

This content is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Speak with your health care provider about your individual situation.