

# Driving After You Have a Stroke

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**You have been a safe driver for years. For you, driving means freedom and control. As you get older, changes in your physical and mental health can affect how safely you drive.**

**Driving is a major concern after you have a stroke. A stroke is a “brain attack” that occurs when the blood flow to the brain is interrupted. A stroke makes brain cells die and damages the brain. Brain injury may change the way you do things, especially your ability to drive safely.**

## How Can a Stroke Affect the Way I Drive?

At first, you may not realize all the effects of the stroke. So it is crucial that you talk with your family and work closely with your health care provider before you start driving again after you have a stroke.

Below are some ways a stroke may affect the way you drive:

- You may not be able to speak, to think or see clearly, or to control your body.
- You may have temporary or permanent weakness or paralysis on one side of your body.
- You may be forgetful, careless, or irritable.
- You may get frustrated easily and be confused while driving.
- You may drift across lane markings, into other lanes.

## Can I Still Drive After a Stroke?

You may be able to drive after a stroke. It depends on where the stroke took place in your brain and how much damage it caused. Many people recover after a stroke and are able to drive safely. But many others will have some type of disability afterward.

Your health care provider will tell you how the stroke affected you, and when and if you can drive. It is important to note that in many areas, it is dangerous and even illegal to drive after a stroke without your doctor’s consent.

## What Can I Do When a Stroke Affects My Driving Safety?

You may not realize how a stroke has changed your ability to drive safely. After initial treatment, your health care provider can tell you about warning signs and symptoms of stroke. Warning signs tend to come on suddenly and may include:

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- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Severe headache with no known cause.

Your health care provider can give you information about rehabilitation after the stroke. He or she also may suggest that you see a driver rehabilitation specialist to help you adjust to any changes caused by the stroke. A driver rehabilitation specialist can test how well you drive on and off the road. This specialist also may help you improve your driving skills by training you to use special equipment that can be fitted on your car to make it easier for you to drive safely.

To find a driver rehabilitation specialist, go to [www.aota.org/olderdriver](http://www.aota.org/olderdriver). Under “Driving & Community Mobility,” click the button in the center of the page marked “Search for a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.” This will link you to a national database. There you can search for names and addresses of local driver rehabilitation specialists.

## What Can I Do if I Have To Limit or Stop Driving?

With proper treatment and support, you may be able to drive safely after a stroke. Even if you have to limit or give up driving, you can stay active and do the things you like to do.

**First, plan ahead.** Talk with family and friends about how you can shift from driver to passenger. Below are some ways to get where you want to go and see the people you want to see:

- Rides with family and friends.
- Taxis.
- Shuttle buses or vans.
- Public buses, trains, and subways.
- Walking.
- Para transit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities; some offer door-to-door service).

**Take someone with you.** You may want to have a family member or friend go with you when you use public transportation or when you walk. Having someone with you can help you get where you want to go without confusion.

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**Find out about transportation services in your area.** Many community-based volunteer programs offer free or low-cost transportation.

## Where Can I Get Help with Transportation?

To find transportation services in your area, visit [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) or call the national ElderCare Locator at **800-677-1116**, and ask for your local Office on Aging.

If you have a disability, check out Easter Seals Project ACTION at [www.projectaction.org](http://www.projectaction.org) or call **800-659-6428**. This project works with the transportation industry and the disability community to give people with disabilities more ways to get around.

## Where Can I Learn More about Stroke?

First, talk with your health care provider. For more information, contact:

- **AMERICAN STROKE ASSOCIATION:** [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org), 888-478-7653 (888-4-STROKE)
- **NATIONAL STROKE ASSOCIATION:** [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org), 800-787-6537 (800-STROKES)
- **NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS AND STROKE:** [www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov), 800-352-9424 or 301-496-5751
- **AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION:** [www.aota.org/olderdriver](http://www.aota.org/olderdriver), 301-652-2682
- **HEALTHFINDER:** [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)
- **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING INFORMATION CENTER:** [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov), [www.nia.nih.gov/espanol](http://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol), 800-222-2225
- **NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION:** [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov), 888-327-4236

**Always Wear Your Seat Belt.  
Do Not Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.**