

Driving when you have had a stroke.

- For most people, driving represents freedom, control and independence. Driving enables most people to get to the places they want to go and to see the people they want to see when they want.
- Driving is a complex skill. Our ability to drive safely can be challenged by changes in our physical, emotional and mental condition.
- The goal of this brochure is to help you, your family and your health care professional talk about how a stroke may affect your ability to drive safely.

How can having a stroke affect my driving?

- A stroke occurs when the blood supply is cut off from a part of the brain. This hurts the brain cells, and can cause you not to be able to speak, to think or see clearly, or to control your body. Stroke may cause temporary or permanent weakness or paralysis on one side of the body. If you have had a stroke and you try to drive, you may:
 - ◆ have trouble turning the steering wheel or applying the brake;
 - ◆ become easily frustrated or confused while driving;
 - ◆ drift across lane markings, into other lanes; and
 - ◆ have difficulty thinking clearly about the traffic around you.

Can I still drive after a stroke?

- Most stroke survivors can return to independent, safe driving. But it depends on where in your brain the stroke took place and how much damage the stroke caused. Until the full extent of your stroke is known, there is no way to tell if and when you will be able to return to driving.

What can I do when a stroke affects my driving?

- After you have been initially treated for stroke, your doctor can talk to you about the warning signs and symptoms of stroke. That may help reduce your risk and impact of future strokes, if they occur.
- Among the warning signs:
 - ◆ sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body;
 - ◆ sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding;
 - ◆ sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;
 - ◆ sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; and
 - ◆ sudden, severe headache with no known cause.
- Your doctor also can provide you with information about rehabilitation after a stroke. Part of that rehabilitation may help you get back on the road safely. Your doctor may refer you to a driving

rehabilitation specialist who may go on a drive with you to see how well you drive. The specialist also may be able to improve your driving skills. One way they may help is by training you on the use of special items that can be fitted on your car to make it easier for you to drive safely.

- Improving your skills could help keep you and others around you safe. To find a driver rehabilitation specialist near you, go to www.aota.org/olderdriver and look up a specialist near you. You also can call hospitals and rehabilitation facilities to find an occupational therapist who can help with the driving skills assessment and remediation. Depending on where you live, you may need to travel to nearby communities to find these services.

What if I have to cut back or give up driving?

- You can keep your independence even if you have to cut back or give up on your driving. It may take planning ahead on your part, but it will get you to the places you want to go and the people you want to see. Consider:
 - ◆ rides with family and friends;
 - ◆ taxi cabs;
 - ◆ shuttle buses or vans;
 - ◆ public buses, trains and subways; and
 - ◆ walking.
- Also, senior centers, and religious and other local service groups often offer transportation services for older adults in your community.

Who can I call for help with transportation?

 Call the ElderCare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 and ask for your local Office on Aging, or go to their website at www.eldercare.gov.

■ Contact your regional transit authority to find out which bus or train to take.

 Call Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation) at 1-800-659-6428 or go to their website at www.easterseals.com/transportation.

Where do I find out more about strokes or rehabilitation after a stroke?

Your first step is to talk with your doctor. You also can contact the:

 American Stroke Association
1-888-478-7653
(1-888-4-STROKE)
www.strokeassociation.org

 National Stroke Association
1-800-787-6537
www.stroke.org

 National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
1-800-352-9424
www.ninds.nih.gov

 American Occupational Therapy Association
1-301-652-2682
www.aota.org/olderdriver

■ Healthfinder
www.healthfinder.gov

 You also can get a copy of the “Age Page On Older Drivers” from the National Institute on Aging by calling 1-800-222-2225, or by going to their website at www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp

Wear your safety belt

Always wear your safety belt when you are driving or riding in a car. Make sure that every person who is riding with you also is buckled up. Wear your safety belt even if your car has air bags.

Driving When You Have Had a Stroke

