

# Driving After a Stroke in Ontario

## Information for me and my family

Driving is a means of independence that is important to many people. A stroke can cause changes that make it unsafe to drive. About half of those who have had a stroke will return to driving<sup>1</sup>. People recover from a stroke at different rates.

### Key points

I am not to drive for at least one month after my stroke **and** I need to wait until my doctor/nurse practitioner says I am safe.

I need to discuss driving with my doctor/nurse practitioner **before** resuming driving to make sure that it is safe for me to drive.

After one month I **may** be able to drive again, as long as my doctor/nurse practitioner agrees it is safe for me to do so.

## Can I drive one month after having a stroke in Ontario?

In Ontario, my doctor/nurse practitioner **may** report to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) that I have had a stroke. This is because it might be dangerous for me to drive a vehicle (such as a car, truck, tractor, etc.).

### The rules in Ontario are:

- My doctor/nurse practitioner must assess my readiness to drive.
- My readiness to drive must be re-evaluated after the one month period.

If the doctor/nurse practitioner is unsure whether I am ready to drive, he or she may tell me to go to a special driving centre for more tests.

**It is illegal to drive with a suspended licence**

1. Devos, H; Akinwuntan, A E; Nieuwboer, A; Truijen, S; Tant, M; De Weerd, W (2011). Screening for fitness to drive after stroke: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neurology*, 76(8).

# What is everyone's responsibility?

## Stroke Survivor (Me):

- Ask my doctor/NP or OT if my licence has been reported to the ministry.
- Not to drive until I have been told by my doctor/NP that it is safe to do so, even if my licence has not been suspended.
- Talk to my doctor/NP and health care team about driving if I have any questions
- Ask my doctor/NP if I need to have my vision checked.
- Check the status of my licence if I am unsure whether it has been suspended (see phone number later in document).

## Doctor/Nurse Practitioner (NP):

- Assess my readiness to return to driving based on tests and reports from the healthcare team.
- Send required reports to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

## Occupational Therapist (OT):

- Complete pre-driving screening tests to assess whether the stroke has impacted parts of the brain that are used for driving.
- Share assessment results with me and my doctor/NP.
- May send information to the MTO

## Ministry of Transportation (MTO)

- Review doctor/NP/OT report and decide whether to suspend my driver's licence.
- Notify me of the decision about my driver's licence.
- Let me know what to do next.

## Family Members/Caregivers:

- Support and provide reminders and guidance to me when I can no longer drive because of potential risk to myself and others.
- Discuss with my doctor/NP if it is felt that I am not safe to drive.

## When should I be tested for driving?

This should be decided on an individual basis. I will need to discuss this with my occupational therapist, doctor/nurse practitioner (NP), or both. The timing is different for everyone. This is because stroke affects everyone differently.

It may be suggested that I wait before any testing is done to allow for more stroke recovery and a chance at better test results.

My doctor/NP or occupational therapist can help me decide when I am ready.

My occupational therapist may do **pre-driving** screenings (pencil and paper and/or physical tests) that will help decide if I am ready to take the on-road test, or if I need more time, training, or testing. See Appendix A for *Changes from My Stroke that Can Impact Driving*.

## What is the process for getting my licence back?

### **When my licence has not been suspended (refer to Appendix B):**

My doctor/nurse practitioner (NP) must agree that I am safe to resume driving before I return to driving any vehicle. I may be told to wait longer than a month before returning to driving. I may also be asked to complete a formal driving assessment. My doctor/NP may be required to send a form into the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

### **When my licence has been suspended (refer to Appendix C):**

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) or my doctor/nurse practitioner (NP) may require my driving skills to be tested. This is called an assessment and may include:

- An in office test
- An on-road driving test
- A vision test

The letter I get from the MTO will explain what to do next, and will link me to the Ministry approved functional assessment centres.

## For a full list of Ministry approved Assessment Centres:

Visit the web site: <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/functional-assessment-centres.shtml>

**Ask the doctor/nurse practitioner or occupational therapist about Ministry of Transportation Approved Driving Assessment Centres in my area where I can take these tests.**

## What happens during a driving assessment?

There are two parts to a **formal** driving assessment:

### **Part One: Pre-road tests**

- Typically, the occupational therapist will do these tests with me at the Ministry approved driving assessment centre.
- The tests will look at my vision, judgment, thinking, and physical skills (strength, sensation, reaction time, and arm, leg & neck movement).
- These tests will show whether I am ready for the on-road test, if I need more practice, or if I 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 my driving skills, such as safety, following directions, and my physical ability to drive a vehicle.
- I will have to cover the cost, which is about \$500 to \$800. This is why it is important to wait until I am ready.

**A referral for the 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 driving assessment?

1. I can return to driving.
2. With changes made to my car, I may be able to return to driving.
3. It is too soon to return to driving. I need driver's rehabilitation. After practicing or learning new ways to drive, I may return for another assessment to see if I am ready to return to driving.
4. I am not able to return to driving.

## What if I am no longer able to drive?

This may be a very hard time for me and my 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 me **in the community**.

**Ask my occupational therapist, or other health care provider, about resources in my community that can help me get to places that I need to go.**

The healthline.ca 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.

I may also be eligible for an accessible parking permit that my occupational therapist (or other health care team member) can help me complete.

Essex, Kent, and Lambton counties: [www.stroke.eriectclairhealthline.ca](http://www.stroke.eriectclairhealthline.ca)

City of London and Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth, Elgin, Oxford, Middlesex and west Norfolk counties: [www.stroke.southwesthealthline.ca](http://www.stroke.southwesthealthline.ca)

I can also call 211 to get information on Ontario's community, social, health related and government services in my local area.



# Appendix A

## Changes from My Stroke that Can Impact Driving

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A stroke can cause some short-term or long-term changes that can impact my ability to drive. These need to be tested to show whether they affect my driving safety. The following are areas that may impact my driving safety:

### **Movement Problems**

- Weakness and fatigue
- Poor coordination and limited movement in my arms, legs, and neck
- Limited sensation, such as difficulty feeling the steering wheel with my hands or feeling the gas pedal with my feet

### **Visual Problems**

- Changes in ability to see clearly or in focus
- Changes in field of vision, or what I am able to see without moving my head

### **Hearing Loss**

- Changing in hearing may affect my 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 my ability to concentrate or pay attention
- Changes in my decision-making speed
- Longer reaction time
- Impulsive behaviour (that is, acting too quickly without thought or planning)
- My body moving in ways that I don’t expect or plan (also known as motor planning problems or apraxia)
- Changes in my judgement
- Changes in my memory

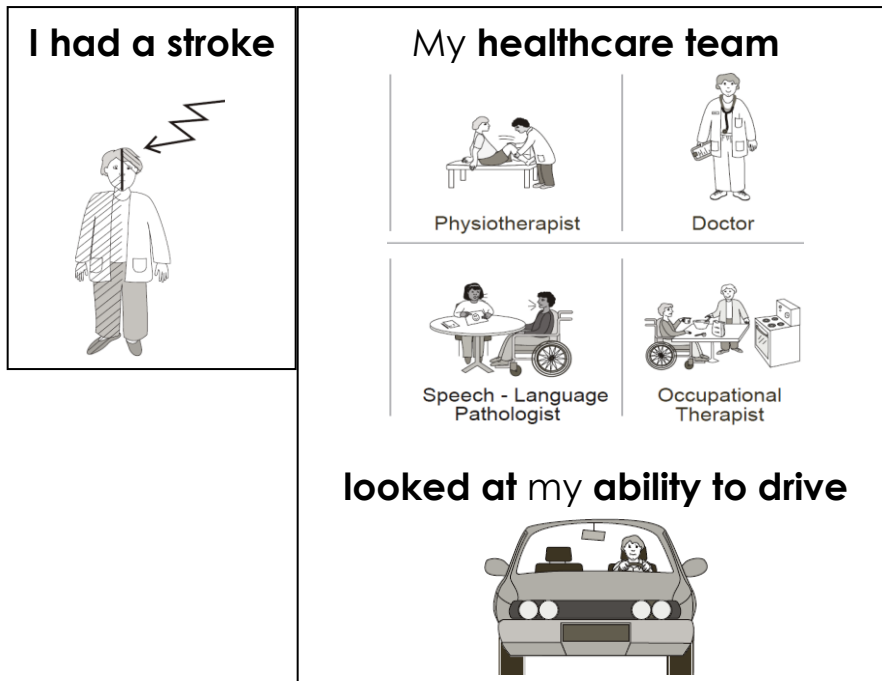
## **Seizures**

- I need to be seizure-free for a minimum of one year prior to being considered to drive again.
- My doctor or nurse practitioner will determine if driving can be considered.



# Appendix B

## Return to Driving After A Licence Suspension



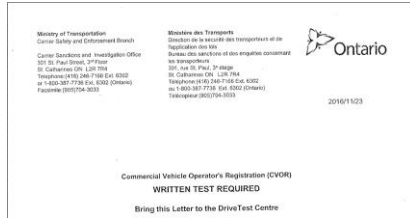
My **licence** is **suspended** and I will receive a letter for my doctor to fill out



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**



**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 C


## Return to Driving When Licence is Not Suspended

**I had a stroke**



**My healthcare team looked at my ability to drive**

 Physiotherapist	 Doctor
 Speech - Language Pathologist	 Occupational Therapist



**I still have my licence**





**I cannot drive**

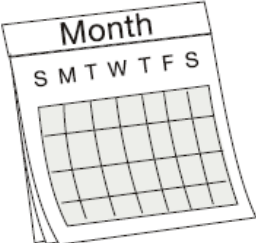


**for 30 days**




I need to **see my doctor** 


**after** 

**30 days** 



**I can drive** 

**I need more time** 

**not driving**  **or**

**a formal test** 