

Stroke, Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) And Driving

This is an overview of the driving risks for drivers who have had a stroke. The complete standards are published in *Sláinte agus Tiomáint: Medical Fitness to Drive (MFTD) Guidelines*.



Stroke and Driving

This leaflet covers medical fitness to drive for stroke, transient ischaemic attack (TIA) and a similar condition called sub-arachnoid haemorrhage.

The guidelines for stroke and driving differ for people who hold a Group 1 driving licence (cars, motorcycles and tractors) and those with a Group 2 licence (buses and trucks). Some of these differences are highlighted in this leaflet and further details can be found in the Sláinte agus Tiomáint Medical Fitness to Drive Guidelines on <https://www.ndls.ie/medical-reports.html>.

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted. Although the number of strokes in Ireland is falling and recovery rates are improving, stroke is still a common condition. If you have had a stroke, this leaflet will help you to get back to driving in the most effective and safest way possible.

After a stroke you might find that one or more of the following abilities have been affected:

- vision
- clear thinking
- quick reactions
- sensation in your limbs
- power in your limbs

A small minority of people may suffer from seizures.

Returning to driving after a stroke

Most people who drove before their stroke can return to driving with the right advice and support from their medical team. They will assess you in the hospital or clinic where you were treated. Some drivers may also need to do an on-road driving assessment with a specialist driving assessor.

It is important that you engage with your medical team to plan any assessments, therapy and the timing of your return to driving with your medical team. Stroke recovery can take a long time for some people; so be patient if you are advised to wait longer before you start driving again.

In all cases of stroke, the current medical guidelines say that you should not return to driving for at least:

- Four weeks for Group 1 drivers (car, motor cycle or tractor).
- Three months for Group 2 drivers (buses and trucks).

This will allow suitable time for treatment and recovery.

When considering if you are fit to drive, your doctor and medical team will assess the following:

Vision – a stroke may affect your vision on one side or part of your range of vision. They will tell you if your vision is good enough to return driving.

Memory, attention, concentration, insight, perception – driving is a complex task and needs a range of brain skills including planning, multi-tasking and the ability to make quick decisions and act quickly. Doctors, occupational therapists and psychologists will assess you and advise you if you have problems with these skills that would affect your ability to drive safely.

Sensation and power in limbs – most Irish drivers drive cars with manual transmission (gears). If you drive a ‘manual’ car you will need good sensation, power and coordination in all four limbs. Some drivers may not regain enough power, sensation or coordination to enable them to drive their usual car. If this happens for you and your memory and attention skills are not affected, there are some alternatives including;

- Having your car professionally adapted
- Switching to a car with an automatic transmission

Both of these options are usually discussed and arranged as part of an on-road driving assessment.

Fatigue – fatigue (extreme tiredness) is common after a stroke and can affect your ability to drive longer distances. Your medical team will check for other causes of fatigue (such as obstructive sleep apnoea). They will advise you about treatment and may advise restrictions on your licence to help to keep you safe while driving.

Seizures – a minority of people affected by stroke develop seizures. Your doctor will explain the driving restrictions that arise with seizures. You should not drive until the doctor explains the conditions under which you can drive again. If you have a seizure within 24 hours of the stroke but you do not have any further seizures, your doctor may tell you this was a ‘provoked seizure’. This has different restrictions compared to the development of epilepsy after a stroke.

TIA (Transient Ischaemic Attack)

A TIA is a minor stroke which causes symptoms which last for less than 24 hours. This should be assessed by a specialist doctor with expertise in stroke for treatable risk factors. If you have a Group 1 driving licence (cars, motorcycles, tractors etc.) you are not allowed to drive for at least one week after your condition has been treated and stabilised. If you have a Group 2 driving licence (trucks and buses) you are not allowed to drive for at least three months after your condition has been treated and stabilised.

Sub-arachnoid haemorrhage

A sub-arachnoid haemorrhage is a condition similar to stroke where a weakness in a vessel wall leads to a bleed in the space surrounding the brain. This can produce effects similar to stroke in terms of vision, brain and/or limb function, and the possibility of seizures. The advice is similar to that for stroke: Ask for advice from the specialist treating you. Your medical team will use a more complex set of criteria when assessing if you are able to return to driving: This will depend on whether you need neurosurgery, the placing of a treatment (coil) within the vessel, and the degree of your recovery.

Specially adapted cars

Even if you have physical disabilities after your stroke, you may still be able to drive safely if you drive a car. Your vehicle can be adapted in various ways and use motoring accessories to make driving possible and more comfortable. Changing from a manual to an automatic vehicle may allow you to return to driving. However, you should wait until your recovery has stabilised before you decide whether or not to return to driving.

The National Standard Authority of Ireland (NSAI) website (shown below) includes a list of companies approved for vehicle conversions.

Why is it important that I'm fully fit to drive?

It is important that you are fully fit to drive because;

- if you continue to drive against medical advice, and evidence shows this, the NDLS and the An Garda Síochána will take action to have your driving licence cancelled. This will also affect your motor insurance.
- if you are involved in a crash or stopped by An Garda Síochána, you might have to prove you are in full control of your vehicle. If you are not in full control, you may be charged even if you don't have an incident or a crash. If you cause harm to a person or property, the charge will be more serious.

Our aim is to help drivers to be as mobile as possible. We also encourage drivers with medical conditions to get a diagnosis and treatment so that they will have less chance of crashing. However, it is important to strike the right balance between mobility and safety for drivers and other road users.

Be a responsible driver

It is your responsibility as a driver to;

- follow your doctor's advice
- take your prescribed medication
- monitor and manage your medical condition(s)
- tell us and your insurance provider if you have a long-term or permanent injury or illness that may affect your ability to drive safely. This can include the effects of a stroke
- meet the requirements of your driving licence, including going for regular medical check-ups
- get professional advice on your medical fitness to drive if your condition changes or if you develop a new condition during the term of your driving licence.

Informing the NDLS and your insurance company

You should inform your insurance company of your stroke or TIA. If you do not, they may not honour a claim that you might make in the future.

If you have a Group 1 driving licence (car, motorcycle, tractor) you do not need to tell us about your stroke unless your specialist advises you that you have a significant loss in your vision, brain or limb function, or you have seizures, but you do need to inform us if you hold a Group 2 licence (trucks and buses). The rules for sub-arachnoid haemorrhage are complex. Ask your doctor if you should inform us.

For TIA there is no need to inform us if you hold a Group 1 licence (cars, motorcycles, tractors etc.) but you do need to inform us if you hold a Group 2 licence (trucks and buses). In all cases the levels of loss of function allowed following a stroke or TIA are lower for Group 2 licence holders.

You must inform us if your doctor advises that your medical condition permits you to drive but needs to be noted on your driving record, or if your licence needs to be changed – for example, valid for a shorter period.

You must bring the following documents in person to any NDLS centre if your licence needs to be changed or you may be able to apply on-line from June 2020 if you have a MyGov ID;

- a completed driving licence application form (D401)
- a medical report form (D501) completed by your doctor (a letter from your doctor is not accepted)
- proof of your PPSN (if not previously provided)
- your current driving licence

Then we will send you a new, updated driving licence in the post. Please see www.ndls.ie for locations, bookings and forms.

If you need to provide medical reports to obtain or renew a driving licence or permit, this is listed as a '101' code on your licence or permit.

Please note that even if you provided a medical report form to get your existing licence or permit and the terms of your licence or permit are not being changed, you should attend an NDLS office with your new application together with your medical report form when you have been diagnosed with a new medical condition.

If you have more questions, please email medicalfitness@rsa.ie or telephone 1890 40 60 40.

Further information sources

Apply online

NDLS:

<https://www.ndls.ie/>

Driver licensing information and forms

NDLS:

<https://www.ndls.ie/medical-reports.html>

RSA:

<https://www.rsa.ie/RSA/Licensed-Drivers/Safe-driving/Medical-Issues/>

Vehicle adaptations and parking permits

NSAI:

<https://www.nsai.ie/certification/automotive/national-type-approva/vehicle-adaption-for-disabled-person>

Revenue Commissioners: Tax incentives:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/life-events-and-personal-circumstances/persons-with-a-disability/drivers-or-passengers-with-a-disability.aspx>

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/documents/vrt/form-dd1.pdf>

Irish Wheelchair Association: Guide to the Disabled Person's Parking Permit

<https://www.iwa.ie/services/motoring/disabled-parking-permit-scheme>

Disabled Driver Association of Ireland:

<https://www.ddai.ie/>

General information and support

Irish Heart Foundation:

<https://irishheart.ie/your-health/learn-about-stroke/driving-after-a-stroke/>

Headway:

<https://headway.ie/i-have-a-brain-injury/driving/>



National Driver Licence Service