

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.

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.

Why is health important for drivers?

Your health is important, as driving any motor vehicle requires:

- constant attention;
- good judgement;
- appropriate responsiveness;
- reasonable perception and physical capability; and
- good senses – for example, sight and hearing.

Why is it important I am fully fit to drive?

- The Road Safety Authority (RSA) and the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) aim to minimise the risk caused by any medical condition you might have both to you and to the community. Indeed, for many conditions, treatment and rehabilitation may improve your safety when driving.

- We also want to give consideration to your social, lifestyle and employment-related mobility and independence. Our aim is to help you be as independently mobile as possible for as long as possible. However, it is important to strike the right balance between mobility and safety for drivers, their families and other road users.
- If you drive against advice, and evidence is found of this, the NDLS and the Gardaí will take action to revoke your licence. If you are involved in a crash or stopped by a member of An Garda Síochána, you may be asked to prove you are in full control of your vehicle. A charge can be brought against you even if you don't have a crash. If you cause harm to a person or property, the charge will be more serious. In these circumstances, driving becomes a statutory offence that may lead to a prison sentence. Finally, driving against medical advice will affect your car insurance.

Returning to driving after a stroke

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-fitness>.

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.

What will happen if I continue to drive?

It is important to strike a balance between mobility and safety. If you continue to drive against medical advice or ignore early warning symptoms, and evidence is found of this, it will affect your insurance, and the NDLS and the Gardaí will take action to revoke (cancel) your licence.

Be a responsible driver

It is your responsibility as a driver to:

- follow your doctor's advice
- take your prescribed medication correctly and consistently
- monitor and manage your medical condition(s)
- tell the NDLS and your insurance provider if you have a long-term or permanent injury or illness that may affect your ability to drive safely
- meet the requirements of your licence, including going for regular medical check-ups to make sure that your symptoms are managed well for safe driving
- get professional medical advice on your medical fitness to drive, which might include training with an On-Road Driving Assessor (ORDA) or Occupational Therapist (OT)
- get further professional medical advice if you develop a new medical condition or if your medical condition changes.

If I need to, how do I inform the NDLS?

If following a consultation with your doctor, your medical condition is one that must be notified to the NDLS you will need to have a medical report form completed and make an application for a change of personal (medical) details. This can be done by

- applying in person at an NDLS centre, which is by appointment only. Please see www.ndls.ie/how-to-apply/applying-in-person
- applying online*, provided you have a Public Services Card and a verified MyGovID account.

*If you have a code 101 on your existing licence and you are not renewing and you wish to update your medical details you will need to attend an NDLS centre to have this done.

The NDLS does not accept notifications of medical conditions by email or post.

For further information, please see

www.ndls.ie/medical-fitness

If you have more questions, please email

medicalfitness@rsa.ie or telephone **096 25000**.

Further information:

Apply online

NDLS:

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

Driver licensing information and forms

NDLS:

<https://www.ndls.ie/medical-fitness>

Vehicle adaptations and parking permits

NSAI:

<https://www.nsai.ie/certification/automotive/national-type-approval/vehicle-adaptation-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