

Driving After a Brain Injury or Stroke

Returning to Driving

Being able to drive may be a priority for you. It is important to know how your brain injury can affect your ability to drive.

Do not drive until your doctor says you are able. He or she may want you to take a comprehensive driver assessment to test your ability to drive safely.

Changes That Could Affect Your Ability to Drive

Your brain injury may cause changes that could affect your ability to drive.

Vision and perception

Vision is what your eyes can see. Perception is how your brain understands what your eyes (and other body parts) are telling it.

- The following can make it hard to see the road or other vehicles:
 - blurry vision
 - double vision
 - loss of peripheral vision (not being able to see cars next to you)
 - visual neglect (you might miss signs or traffic hazards on the right or left side)
 - light sensitivity (glare from the sun or car headlights).
- You may have trouble judging distance and speed between your vehicle and other objects.

Fatigue

Fatigue (feeling very tired) can make it hard to have enough energy to drive safely.

When you get tired, your brain can't process all of the information it is getting. You can't focus and concentrate.

Fatigue puts you at risk for causing an accident such as not stopping at a stop sign, changing lanes without looking or falling asleep.

Cognition (attention and memory)

- Driving takes a lot of attention.
 - You need to be able to focus and switch your attention quickly.
 - You need to be able to identify what is important (such as vehicles around you, road work or the speed limit) and what isn't as important.
- Memory problems can make it hard for you to remember where you are going or what was happening around you.
- You might have trouble anticipating other drivers' actions or making the right decision on how to react. You might react too slowly or react without thinking about what could happen (such as switching lanes without looking).
- You might have trouble recognizing road signs or understanding written and spoken directions.

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- Your insight or self-awareness might be affected. You might think you are OK to drive and know how to operate your vehicle yet you don't know your limits or know that you might not be safe to drive.

Physical ability

You may still be able to drive if you have issues with moving, strength and coordination. Adaptive equipment such as a wheelchair lift, hand controls or swivel seating can be installed into your vehicle.

- Talk with your doctor to learn if adaptive equipment for your vehicle is right for you. This can help you return to driving safely.
- You will need an assessment to identify what equipment you need. You will need training to learn how to use the adaptive equipment.
- You will need to pass the Minnesota road test to have the adaptive equipment added as a restriction on your driver's license.

Emotions

Driving can be overwhelming. You might:

- have trouble staying calm
- get frustrated with other drivers or bad weather
- worry about driving if your brain injury happened in a motor vehicle accident.

Consider talking with a mental health care provider, a driver rehabilitation specialist or both. They can help you get ready to return to driving.

Medicines Can Affect Your Ability to Drive

Some medicines cause side effects that can affect your driving.

- Prescription medicines can make you dizzy, blur your vision or relax your muscles.
- Over-the-counter medicines (including vitamins, naturals and herbals) can interact with your prescribed medicines. This means your medicines might work stronger or weaker than they should.

Important: Before you drive, check with your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have questions about your current medicines
- have changes to your medicines
- have a new prescription medicine
- are thinking about taking a new or different medicine.

Whom to Contact for More Information

For more information about the Driver Assessment and Training Services:

- go to account.allinahealth.org/services/583
- call 612-775-2829
- send an email to CKRIDrivingService@Allina.com.