

Recovery After Stroke: Ability to Go Places

Getting out of the house allows stroke survivors a chance to regain a sense of freedom, control and independence. Going to the places you want to go, doing the things you enjoy, and spending time with other people will help the recovery process.

Driving involves many skills – skills that can be affected by stroke. Luckily, most stroke survivors can regain the ability to drive safely by getting new training and/or using special equipment. Those who are unable to do so learn new ways of getting around.

Getting Behind the Wheel

The first step is to get an evaluation by a driver rehabilitation specialist (DRS). The DRS is a person trained to work with drivers who have disabilities. The evaluation will include:

- a vision exam
- a perception test to see if you can react in a timely manner

The DRS may offer tips to improve your driving skills and can train you on the use of equipment that will make driving easier. Improving your driving skills will keep you and others around you safe.

To find a DRS in your area, contact:

- The Association of Driver Educators for the Disabled (ADED). Call 1-608-884-8833.
- The American Occupational Therapy Association. Call 1-800-377-8555 or visit www.aota.org on the Internet.

Tips For Safe Driving

- Always make sure you and your passengers wear seatbelts.
- Drive in familiar areas.
- Drive on roads that are not busy.
- Use clearly marked lanes.
- Combine trips.
- Keep windshields clean to help you see better.
- Turn off the radio, phone, and other things that can take your attention away from driving.
- Avoid driving at night.
- Plan your travel so that you are off the road during rush-hour traffic or during bad weather.

Adaptive Equipment

There are many types of equipment that can be fitted on your car to help you drive again. Of course, you will have to get training on how to use the equipment safely.

Examples of adaptive equipment include:

- A spinner knob that is attached to the steering wheel to allow controlled steering with the use of one hand.
- Hand controls for the accelerator and brake.
- Left-foot pedals if you are unable to use your right foot to accelerate and brake.
- Wheelchair and scooter lifts.

Your DRS will help you find equipment that meets your needs.

Getting Around Town

When you go out, plan ahead to make sure that your needs can be met.

Ask questions before going somewhere new:

- How easy is it to get to the place I am going?
- How far is the parking area from the entrance?
- Are there handicapped parking spaces?
- Are there steps leading into the building? How many? Are there hand railings?
- Are there ramps leading into the building?
- Are doorways wide enough (at least 32 inches) for a wheelchair?
- Is there a bathroom that meets my needs?
- Will a wheelchair fit in the bathroom stalls? Do the stalls have grab bars?
- Is there an elevator in the building?

Longer Trips

After you get used to leaving the house, you may be ready to travel. Whether an overnight trip or a long vacation, a change of scenery can be a morale booster to you and your loved ones.

Again, advance planning will go a long way in making your trip smooth and enjoyable.

Use this sample checklist to remind you to:

- Check with your doctor before making your plans. You may need some specific travel tips.
- Call the places you plan to visit in advance and ask about accessibility of hotels, restaurants, attractions and transportation.
- Take all medicines and essentials in a bag you carry with you.
- Ask for a hotel room that is close to the elevator and includes a walk-in shower.
- Talk with your airline in advance about special needs, including meals.
- Two to three weeks before your trip, reserve rental cars with hand controls. Wheelchair rental vans can be rented at most places, but plan ahead to get one because supplies are often limited.
- Try renting a scooter to get around. You can rent scooters in many major cities.
- Bring your health insurance cards with you. Know the policies and procedures of your insurance company.
- Carry a list of all the medicines you are taking and your drug allergies in your wallet. Take this with you at all times.
- Plan to do less, rather than more. Travel can be stressful and tiring, especially for stroke survivors. Allow plenty of time for rest, regular meals and exercise.

Unable to Drive?

You may not be able to drive after suffering a stroke. You may have trouble turning the steering wheel or thinking clearly about the cars around you. Don't worry. You can still maintain your independence and get to the places you want to go. There are several alternatives to driving. Plan ahead to make the most of your outing.

Consider these options for getting around:

- Ride with family and friends.
- Take a taxi, shuttle bus or van.
- Use public transportation such as buses, trains and subways.
- Try a scooter.
- Walk.

Who Can Help

- A driver rehabilitation specialist (DRS)
– a driver’s education teacher who specializes in drivers with disabilities.

basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. Rehabilitation can also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. The goal is to regain as much independence as possible.

Remember to ask your doctor, “Where am I on my stroke recovery journey?”

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctors about any personal medical concerns.

Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from a stroke. Through rehabilitation, you relearn