



Motoring after a stroke

Motoring after a stroke

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Driving after a stroke | 3 |
| Choosing a car | 5 |
| Products and techniques | 6 |
| Finance | 9 |
| Further information | 10 |

This Rica booklet is for people who have had a stroke and outlines some of the key things to consider when getting back to driving. It also covers specialist products and techniques which may help you.

This information comes from consultation with people with multiple sclerosis and other experts. Product and price information comes from Rica's market research – use it as a guide only and shop around for the best price.

More detailed guidance on choosing and using a car can be found in the Rica guides shown here. Call us to request free copies or read them on our website:

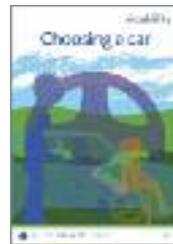
020 7427 2460

www.rica.org.uk

The website also has the **Car search** page that lets you search for cars by their measurements and will help you find a car to suit you.

Mobility address list

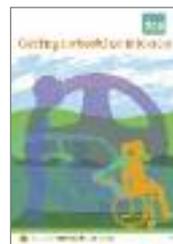
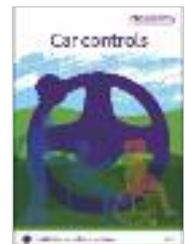
Addresses of all adaptation suppliers and car converters in the UK and details of the services they offer



Choosing a car

Details of features that may help you and ways of adapting a car

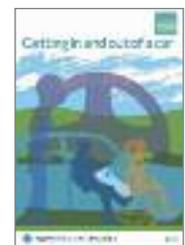
Car controls
Information on types of adaptations and how to get them



Getting a wheelchair into a car

Equipment to help you stow or carry a wheelchair

Getting in and out of a car
Techniques that may help and details of equipment that is available



Wheelchair accessible vehicles

Information on converted vehicles to carry you in your wheelchair

Family cars
Issues affecting families of disabled children and information about cars and standard and specialist equipment





Driving after a stroke

A stroke can damage any part of your brain. The effects – which can be temporary or permanent – vary hugely, depending on which part is affected and how extensive the damage is.

Most people recover from some or all of the effects of a stroke, but progress can be very slow, and you may not recover completely.

EFFECTS OF A STROKE

Driving involves seeing, understanding, concentration, memory and judgment as well as physical action. A stroke can affect all of these and may affect your ability to drive. A stroke can:

- cause **physical disabilities**
- make it hard for you to **see**
- make it hard for you to **think**
- cause **communication difficulties**.

Physical disabilities

You may experience some or all of the following:

- weakness or paralysis in limbs
- altered sensation in limbs
- loss of coordination

- spasms in your limbs resulting in uncontrolled movements.

Car adaptations can often overcome problems affecting your limbs. See p6–8 for summaries and our *Car controls* guide for more detail. Limb spasms may be controlled by medication and cars can be adapted so these won't affect the pedals.

Seeing

Changes in your vision can include:

- blind spots or reduced field of vision, so it's hard to see some areas without turning your head
- blurred or double vision
- difficulty with your judgement of speed, distance and depth
- inattention.

You must be able to read a number plate at a distance of 20 metres to be allowed to drive.

A specialist in vision, an orthoptist or ophthalmologist, will need to assess any visual impairment you have and advise you on how it affects your ability to drive. If you don't have one ask your GP for a referral.

Thinking

You may find it hard to:

- read the road or work out what is happening. For example, you may not notice a stop sign.
- react in time
- foresee the consequences of actions or situations
- concentrate. You may be easily distracted, get muddled, or lose track.
- remember things.

You may also find you get tired more quickly, which may mean that you cannot drive for as long as you used to.

Communication

If you have communication difficulties that affect your comprehension, this can make it hard for you to understand road signs or work out what other road users are doing.

Recovery

After a stroke you might want to get straight behind the wheel, but don't rush – recovery can take two years or even longer.

Looking carefully at the way you drive, choosing a car with the right features and fitting the right adaptations can help you overcome any lasting difficulties so you will very likely be able to continue driving if you have had a good recovery.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

You must not drive a car for at least a month after a stroke. If your GP is happy that you have made a full recovery, you can return to driving, but if you have on-going problems, you must tell the DVLA.

If you think you are able to drive, you can ask for an assessment straight away.

Alternatively you can surrender your licence temporarily and apply to have it reinstated when you feel you are ready to drive again.

The DVLA will assess your fitness to drive using the information you give them. They may contact your doctor – with your permission – and may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment (see page 5).

You may be:

- allowed to keep your licence
- given a temporary licence for one, two or three years
- given a licence to drive an automatic or a car with specialist controls (this will be coded on the licence)
- told to stop driving for a short time or, in extreme cases, forever.

You can appeal if you do not agree with the DVLA's decision.

For more information on driving licences get *What you need to know about driving licences* (D100) from a post office or go to www.gov.uk/dvla.

Take care

- **Before you return to driving, make sure you tell your insurance company about the DVLA decision – whatever it is – and about any special controls you use (or if you have to drive an automatic) – or you may not be covered.**
- **Do not make any fixed plans about finance for a car until the DVLA have confirmed that you can continue to drive – you could end up paying for a car you can't use.**

DRIVING ABILITY ASSESSMENT

The most important piece of advice we can give is to get an independent assessment. A Mobility Centre (see page 11) can do this. It can cost up to £180 depending on where you are. They will tell you:

- if you are safe to drive
- what you can do to make driving safer and easier
- where you can find specialist driving lessons
- where you can get specialist equipment
- where you can go for help with funding.

An assessment will also help make sure you are complying with the law about driving. The Mobility Centre will not notify the DVLA about your assessment without your permission.

The driving assessment is not a test. It is used to determine if you are ready to go back to driving. If you are it can help you and your family feel more confident about your driving.

DRIVING LESSONS

The effects of your stroke may be lasting but any of them can improve with time. Most people keep many of the driving skills they had before their stroke but you may still need specialist driving lessons, especially if you are using adapted controls.

These will help you build your confidence and learn how to deal with the effects of your stroke and how to change the way you drive if you need to. Be prepared for this to take time.



Choosing a car

1 Ask some basic questions

Think about what you may need in future as well as about what suits you now. For more information see pages 6–8 and our other guides.

Will you keep your car or change it?

If your car is too difficult to use, you may need to get a new one. If you're getting a new car, look for features that will make your life easier. Many features that are helpful to disabled motorists, like power steering, are now available on a wider range of models, so you should have some choice. Remember that the less a car is modified, the higher its resale value.

How will you get in and out? Do you need wide or high doors, or specialist equipment to help?

Will you be comfortable in the seat? Is it supportive? Can you sit without pain? Can you reach the controls?

Will you need specialist controls? There is a wide range – from simple gadgets to more complex controls.

What equipment will you carry? Think about everyday and occasional use.

Do you use a wheelchair?

2 Collect information

Start with motoring magazines and the internet plus manufacturers' brochures. You may also try the following:

- **Reviews by disabled drivers** in Motability's magazine *Lifestyle* and in newsletters of disabled motorists' organisations (see pages 10–11).
- **Mobility Centres** (see page 11) can assess your driving and find out what equipment may suit you.

- **Mobility Roadshows** (see page 11)
Visit one of these free events to see and try out vehicles and adaptations and other mobility equipment.
- **Motability** (see page 11) have free guides, in print or on their website and run One Big Day roadshow events where you can get advice and try out vehicles and equipment.

Find a car

- use Rica's online database of car measurements at www.rica.org.uk/car-search
- search for a particular seat height, wide doors, low sills or lots of headroom or look for a boot to fit your wheelchair

3 Try out before buying

Try any car you are considering. Dealers may bring one to you and should be able to find an automatic version. Try getting in and out several times. If you use a wheelchair, check that it fits. You might be able to try out adapted cars at a Mobility Centre or an adaptation firm. They will also tell you if the adaptations can be fitted to your chosen car.

4 Get plenty of practice

It is advisable to have lessons with an instructor using the adaptations you have chosen – essential when learning to use a left foot accelerator (see page 8). Mobility Centres can help you find an instructor. Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car.

Products and techniques

GETTING IN AND OUT

The best way to get in is to sit in the seat first then turn and bring your legs in, doing the reverse to get out.

Look for the following features:

- **doors which open easily**
- **high and wide door openings – doors on two- and three-door cars are usually wider**
- **no door sills, or low, narrow sills**
- **handholds you can use when getting in and out**
- **seat height that suits you**
- **seats that move up and down and back and forwards easily**
- **plenty of space around the seat.**

If you need more space to get in and out, you can have the seat moved backwards.

If swivelling helps, there are turning cushions (from £10 from general aids suppliers) and swivel seats, from £1,250. There are also swivel seats that lift and lower you out of the vehicle, from £5,800. Our guide *Getting in and out of a car* gives more information.

For any of these, contact adaptation firms in our Mobility address list.

Wheelchair users

See our guides *Getting a wheelchair into a car* for more information on devices and techniques for getting you and your wheelchair into your car, and *Wheelchair accessible vehicles* for information on vehicles that allow you to travel in your wheelchair.

LOCKING AND IGNITION

Look for the following features:

- **remote and central locking**
- **keyless entry system**
- **push-button start**
- **windows that close automatically when the car is locked.**

PRIMARY CONTROLS

For changing gears, steering, and controlling speed. Look for the following features:

- **automatic gears – may make driving less stressful and tiring**
- **power steering**
- **cruise control to maintain a constant speed**
- **electronic handbrakes – can be helpful if you have a weak hand.**

Steering – You can fit a steering ball or spinner to the steering wheel to let you steer one-handed.

Spinners come in several shapes and sizes to suit different types of grip. Most cost between £10 and £110.



Steering wheel spinners from Alfred Bekker

Changing gears – This is very much easier with automatic transmission. This means fewer gear changes, and also helps with pulling away if it has hillstart assist.

If you cannot use a mechanical gear selector, you can have an electronic system fitted, but these can be expensive. Take advice from a Mobility Centre before investing in one of these systems.



Electronic gear selector, from Adaptacar

To change gear in a manual car, you have to use the gear selector with your left hand, and the clutch pedal with your left foot, both at the same time.

Some cars have automated manual gear systems which work without using a clutch pedal. You move a lever to the right setting or push buttons or paddles on the steering wheel.



Gear controls on steering wheel

Adaptation firms can also fit a lever or button on the gear stick of a manual car that allows you to operate the clutch with the same hand that you use to change gear. These cost from £1,975 but they may mean that you can continue driving a manual car.

Accelerating and braking – If the strength or control of your legs is poor, you may be able to have more brake assistance added to reduce the effort.

If your right leg is affected and you cannot use the accelerator pedal, you can fit a left foot accelerator, for around £400. So that other people can drive the car, these are removable or made so that you can flip the other pedal down.



Removable left foot accelerator, from Brig Ayd



Flip-up left foot accelerator, from Jeff Gosling

Caution

Learning to drive with a left foot accelerator takes a lot of time and practice, especially if you have been used to driving an unadapted car. Specialist driving lessons are essential.

Parking brake – Mechanical attachments can make it easier to use the handbrake, from £70. Electronic parking brakes cost from around £700.

RSE Auto-brake can be fitted to a manual car to help with pulling away – ask your adaptation advisor.

SECONDARY CONTROLS

For controls like the lights and indicators. Try to find a model where these are in the best position for you. Also look for:

- **automatic wipers and lights**
- **parking sensors or cameras**
- **electric windows and mirrors**
- **'take me home' headlights – stay on for a while after you get out.**

There are many simple attachments to make secondary controls easier to use and several systems which bring all the controls together. They can be adjusted to meet your individual needs. Prices vary depending on how complex they are and on the wiring system of the car.



Steering knob combined with wireless secondary controls, from Autoadapt

BOOT

Look for the following features:

- **no sill or low sill**
- **internal boot release**
- **powered boot opening/closing**
- **space for your wheelchair or scooter if you use one.**

RICA GUIDES

Getting in and out of a car

- hoists which lift and lower you on to a car seat
- lifting seats which swing in and out of the car, lowering and locking into a position to suit you
- wheelchair systems where a specially designed wheelchair slides into the car while you are sitting in it and becomes the car seat.

Getting a wheelchair into a car

- hoists, lifts and ramps to help get a wheelchair or scooter into the boot
- boot and rooftop hoists which stow a manual chair in the car or on the roof once you are in your seat
- trailers and racks which carry a wheelchair on the back of the car.

Car controls

- primary and secondary control adaptations.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles

- vehicles where you travel in your own wheelchair or transfer inside the car.



Finance

Motability – Scheme for people receiving the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement (see page 11 for more information).

Access to Work – May help if you are working or about to start work. Go to www.gov.uk/access-to-work or ask at your Jobcentre.

Charities – To find a grant maker try:

- your library for local charities such as the Round Table or Lions Clubs
- Charity Search – helps people over 50 find a grant-giving charity: 0117 982 4060 (9am–3pm)
- Turn2Us: a website for people in financial need: 0808 802 2000 www.turn2us.org.uk
- contacting local support groups (see pages 10-11 for details).

VAT exemption on adaptations – You do not have to pay VAT on adaptations or their installation, repairs or maintenance. You may not have to pay VAT on the purchase and maintenance of an adapted car. Talk to your supplier or see information available from HMRC (see page 11).

Vehicle Excise Duty (Road Tax) – You don't have to pay this if you get the Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or AFIP. You claim the exemption when you apply for your tax disc. You will have to show evidence of your entitlement to the relevant benefit. See www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions/tax-disc-exemptions.

Car insurance – Under the Equality Act 2010, insurance companies are not allowed to refuse disabled drivers insurance or charge extra without justifying evidence. Shop around for the best deal. If you have a heavily adapted car, Mobility Centres and DMUK (see page 10) have lists of companies that specialise in insuring disabled drivers.



Further information

Blue Badge parking scheme

Allows disabled people to park in restricted areas, but do read and follow the conditions of use carefully. The scheme is administered by local authorities who deal with applications and issue badges.

For questions about the Blue Badge scheme contact your local council or the Initial Enquiry Support Service.

Tel (England) 0844 463 0213

Tel (Scotland) 0844 463 0214

Tel (Wales) 0844 463 0215

Email

**bluebadge@northgate-is.com
www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge**

Brain and Spine Foundation

- research, education and information
- help and advice to people affected by brain and spine disorders including strokes.

Freephone 0808 808 1000

Email helpline@brainandspine.org.uk
www.brainandspine.org.uk

Chest, Heart and Stroke, Scotland

- support and information
- community groups
- personal support grant scheme.

Helpline 0808 801 0899

Email admin@chss.org.uk
www.chss.org.uk

Different Strokes

- national charity run by and for young stroke survivors
- information
- local support groups and exercise classes.

Tel 0845 130 7172

Email info@differentstrokes.co.uk
www.differentstrokes.co.uk

Disability Benefits Helpline

- government information service

Tel (DLA) 0345 712 3456

Tel (PIP) 0345 850 3322

www.gov.uk/disability-benefits-helpline

Disabled Living Foundation

- advice and information on disability equipment.

Tel 0300 999 0004 (10am-4pm)

www.dlf.org.uk

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Disabled Motoring UK

- self help organisation run by and for disabled people. It works to encourage and increase mobility. Membership £24 per year – includes monthly magazine.

Ashwellthorpe

Norwich NR16 1EX

Tel 01508 489449

Email info@disabledmotoring.org
www.disabledmotoring.org

DVLA

Drivers Medical Group

Tel 0300 790 6806

Fax 0845 850 0095

Email eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dvla-medical-enquiries

Northern Ireland: Driver & Vehicle Agency

Drivers Medical Section

Tel 0845 402 4000

Email: dva@doeni.gov.uk

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

- national information service on driving, specialist equipment and vehicle adaptations
- a network of independent, accredited Mobility Centres which will assess your driving and give you advice about how to make it safer, easier and more comfortable, give advice to carers and in some cases help you find a specialist driving instructor.

Freephone 0800 559 3636

www.mobility-centres.org.uk

HM Revenue and Customs

- VAT relief on adaptations (VAT Notice 701/7) and motor vehicles (VAT Notice 701/59) for disabled people.

Tel 0300 123 1073

www.gov.uk/hmrc

The Mobility Roadshow

- free events with advice, demonstrations and test drives on cars and mobility products and services.

Email info@mobilityroadshow.co.uk

www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk

Motability

- use your Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or AFIP, or your War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement to lease a car. Maintenance and servicing, insurance and breakdown assistance are included. Motability contribute towards the cost of adaptations
- you may have to make an advance payment to cover the cost of the car.

Tel 0300 456 4566

Textphone 0300 037 0100

www.motability.co.uk

Remap

- voluntary group of engineers who design and manufacture devices when there is nothing else on the market.

England, Wales and NI

Tel 0845 130 0456

Email info@remap.org.uk

www.remap.org.uk

Remap Scotland

Tel 01466 730 736

Email remap-scotland@btconnect.com

www.remap-scotland.org

Stroke Association

- information on stroke and its effects, including factsheets
- advice and emotional support
- welfare grants.

Helpline 0303 303 3100

Email info@stroke.org.uk

www.stroke.org.uk



Consumer research for older and disabled people

Consumer research for older and disabled people.

Rica is an independent research charity that publishes practical consumer information.

Tel 020 7427 2460
Email mail@rica.org.uk
www.rica.org.uk

 @RicaUK
 facebook.com/RicaUK

The information in this guide is correct at the time of going to print (April 2015). It is reviewed every two years. See our website for any changes since printing.



ISBN: 978-1-907408-29-8
© Rica 2015

In partnership with:



forum of mobility centres

