Personal Resources

About this Section

Why is this Section Important?

This section is a place to gather the additional resources you receive during your stroke recovery.

How to Use this Section

In this section you can keep any additional information you collect. Individuals will likely provide you with written information as you recover. You may receive information handouts with:

- Strategies for how to safely swallow or communicate
- Exercises you can do on your own or with your caregiver
- Ways to change your diet to reduce your risk factors
- Community programs

Remember, this binder is specific to you. The information in this binder, once no longer needed, can be safely discarded

Returning to Driving After Stroke

Information from the Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network

Driving After a Stroke

For many people, being able to drive is an important part of maintaining independence and staying connected with their community. Your ability to drive depends on good vision, quick thinking skills, and the ability to physically operate a vehicle. A stroke can cause changes in the brain that may affect one or more of these skills, making it unsafe to drive. About half of stroke survivors will return to driving.

Why Can't I Return to Driving Right Away?

After a brain injury such as a stroke, you may have difficulties with thinking, vision, processing information, or moving your body. This may make it dangerous to drive a vehicle. You may also have a medical condition that could put you at risk of losing consciousness at the wheel. Your medications and medical conditions need to be stable before your doctor or Nurse Practitioner (NP) say it is safe to return to driving.

My Return to Driving After Stroke Checklist

- ☐ I am not to drive for at least one month after my stroke. This includes all licenced vehicles such as cars, trucks, tractors and heavy machinery;

AND

- ☐ My doctor/NP must tell me that I can return to driving (this may involve additional testing, re-training and/or completing an on-road assessment);

AND

- ☐ My licence must be valid or re-instated before I can drive again.

Licence Reporting

In Ontario, your healthcare team **may** report to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) that you have had a stroke. This is for your safety. In this case, the MTO will send you a letter in the mail letting you know the next steps. It may take up to 6 weeks to get your letter. If your licence is suspended, you are not able to return to driving until the conditions set out by the letter are met. If you choose to drive without medical clearance or a suspended licence, your insurance may not protect you after an accident.

It is illegal to drive with a suspended licence.

Stroke Effects

And How They Impact Driving

Physical

- Weakness and fatigue
- Poor coordination and/or limited movement in arms, legs, and neck
- Altered sensation: difficulty feeling the steering wheel or gas pedal
- Decreased proprioception (inability to know where arms and/or legs are when not looking at them)

Cognition

- Trouble maintaining focus and/or difficulty dividing attention
- Slower processing speed and reaction time
- Impulsive behavior (acting quickly without thought)
- Changes in judgement
- Decreased memory

Perception

- Poor spatial awareness
- Visual neglect/inattention (a “blind side” that the brain forgets is there)
- Motor planning problems or apraxia (the body moving in unexpected ways and without ability to control)

Vision

- Blurry or double vision
- Changes in field of vision (what the eyes see without moving the head)
- Difficulty activating the muscles that move the eye
- Must meet specific vision criteria set out by the MTO

Speech & Language

- Challenges with asking for help or directions.
- Difficulty with reading and interpreting signs in a timely manner.
- Impaired ability to communicate with emergency personnel if needed.

Medical

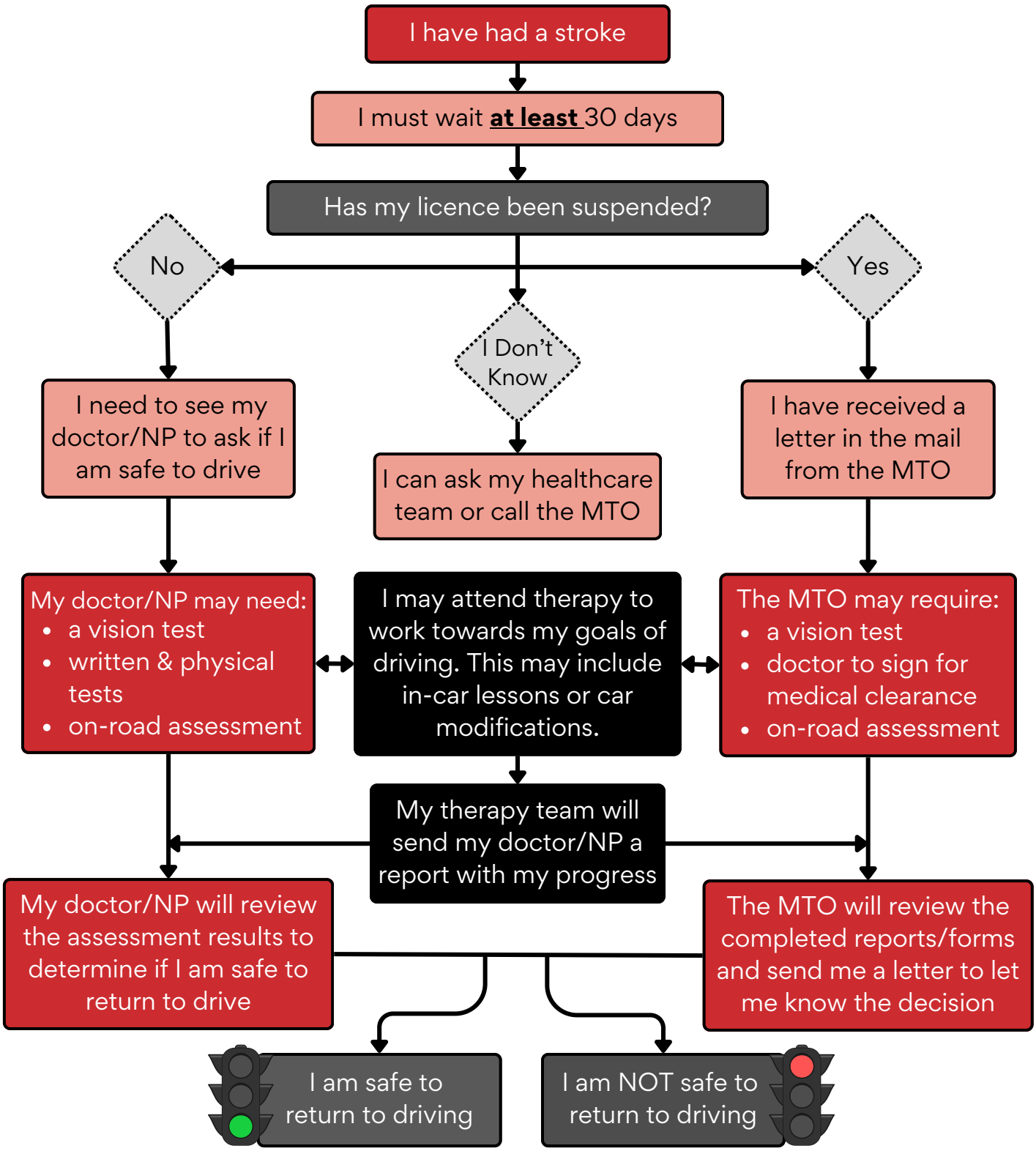
- Typically must be seizure free for at least 1 year
- Must be medically stable and not at risk of becoming unconscious at the wheel
- Certain medications may impact safety with driving
- Hearing loss

When should I be tested for driving?

There is no specific recommendation for timing of testing, as stroke affects each person differently. Your therapy team will assess your readiness to return to driving and will let your doctor or NP know how your recovery is progressing. Some people will require an on-road test at an approved “Functional Assessment Centre”. See page **4** for more details.

My Road to Recovery

A Step-by-Step Guide



On-Road Assessments

Functional Driving Centres

What is a Functional Driving Assessment?

Sometimes an on-road assessment is required by the MTO or your doctor/NP before you can return to driving. This is different from the driving tests at Service Ontario. These assessments happen at approved locations called “Functional Assessment Centres”.

Where does the referral come from?
Your doctor, NP, the MTO, or your Occupational Therapist (OT) will send a referral on your behalf.

How much does it cost?
This assessment is NOT covered by OHIP and will cost between $500-$800.

Where can I find a functional assessment centre nearby?
A full list can be found online at the MTO website, or your healthcare team can provide you with a list of centres in your area.

The assessment will take 3-4 hours and is split into two parts: pre-road testing, and an on-road assessment.

Pre-Road Testing

- In-office interview and testing with an OT. They will look at:
  - Vision
  - Physical movements
  - Cognition & perception
  - Driving and medical history
- This will give them important information and will help determine if you are ready for an on-road test

On-Road Assessment

- Done in a car with a certified driving Instructor and the OT
- They will look at driving skills, such as:
  - Safety
  - Following directions
  - Your ability to operate the vehicle controls
- They may also try vehicle modifications if needed.

What are the Possible Results?

I am SAFE to return to driving. I will wait until the ministry re-instates my licence and I get confirmation in the mail. This may take up to 4 weeks.

With changes to my car, I MAY be safe to return to driving
OR
I need in-car lessons. After my lessons, I will be re-assessed.

I am NOT SAFE to return to driving. I can appeal this decision. Steps will be provided in my letter from the MTO after my test.

Retiring from Driving

Staying Independent & Mobile

What if I can't return to driving?

Sometimes, there are lasting effects from your stroke that make driving unsafe. When this happens, returning to driving may not be possible. Having a stroke can have a significant impact on your mental health and mood which can also be heightened by the potential loss of the ability to continue driving. Your new functional status may change how you care for yourself and interact with others.

Connecting with therapy resources (ie. counselling) within your community may be helpful when learning how to cope with this change and reframe your new way of living. For more information on local resources and supports, please contact your primary health care provider and/or speak with a Social Worker that is involved in your care.

Making a Transportation Plan

A transportation plan is one way to manage your community mobility needs. You can do this on your own, or with your healthcare team.

1. Start with writing down a full list of places that you go regularly. Note how often you need to go to these places.
2. Gather a list of alternative transportation options in the community. Consider delivery options, meal service providers, ride sharing options, and taxis as well as friends/family.
3. Match each place with an alternative option.
4. Be sure to also consider any costs.
5. Remember to review and update your plan regularly as your needs may change.

Ask your Occupational Therapist or other healthcare provider for a list of resources in your community.

Healthline

Healthline is an online resource that helps people find programs in their communities, to meet their needs. These programs include transportation support but also assistance with grocery shopping, meal delivery services, medication delivery services, etc.

- Essex, Kent & Lambton Counties: www.stroke.eriestclairhealthline.ca
- City of London and Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth, Elgin, Oxford, Middlesex and west Norfolk counties: www.stroke.southwesthealthline.ca

Working Together

Roles and Responsibilities

Stroke Survivor (You)

- Recover from your stroke. Participate in therapy and work towards your goals.
- Do not drive until:
  - It has been at least 30 days AND;
  - You have been cleared to drive by your doctor, NP, and/or Ministry of Transportation; AND
  - Your licence is valid or has been reinstated.
- Ask if you have questions:
  - Your medical/therapy team
  - Ministry of Transportation
    - Online: https://shorturl.at/b8AtU
    - Phone: 1-800-268-1481

Family and Care Partners

- Provide support, reminders and guidance to the stroke survivor.
- Assist as able to create an alternate transportation plan as needed.
- Ask questions/ discuss concerns if they arise with the medical or therapy team.

Ministry of Transportation

- Review doctor/NP/OT report and decide whether or not to suspend your driver's licence.
- Notify you of the decision about your driver's licence and next steps to take.

Therapy Team

Occupational Therapist (OT), Physiotherapist (PT), Social Worker (SW), Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)

- Conducts screening tests and helps decide if/when the stroke survivor is ready for an in-car assessment.
- Helps with accessing alternative transportation and creating a plan to assist with community mobility.
- Works with the stroke survivor to improve any stroke-related deficits (physical, cognitive, perceptual, etc.)
- Shares assessment results with the medical team.
- May send information to the MTO.

Functional Assessment Centre

- Assist with obtaining a temporary licence if needed for the on-road test.
- Complete functional assessment and report findings to the Ministry of Transportation.
- Make recommendations for adaptive vehicle modifications if necessary.
- Offer in-car training when indicated.

Medical Team

Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Eye Doctor

- Assess your readiness to return to driving based on test results and evaluation from your therapy team.
- Sends required reports to the MTO.

This resource was developed by the members of the Southwestern Ontario Occupational Therapy Stroke Network in alignment with the Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations. Information was adapted with permission from "Driving after a stroke" (© 2011)" From Hamilton Health Sciences, Hamilton ON Canada. **Inquiries can be made to swosn@lhsc.on.ca; Last Updated: July, 2024**