

Driving after a stroke

Following a stroke, no matter how good the recovery, a person must not drive a motor vehicle until medical clearance has been given.

Sometimes a person feels very strongly that they want and are able to resume driving, regardless of advice, and it may be necessary to remove the car keys. The effects of the stroke can not only affect driving ability, but make the person unaware that any problem exists.

Assessment of fitness to drive

Driving assessments are carried out by a specialist occupational therapist, or by specialist driving instructors who provide services for disabled drivers throughout New Zealand. For further information phone Enable New Zealand, the national disability information service, on freephone 0800 362 253. Not every person who has had a stroke will need to undergo this assessment.

Unfitness to drive

If the doctor has decided a person is not fit to resume driving, and this opinion is not accepted, a second opinion may be sought from another medical practitioner, eg, an appropriate specialist, at the person's expense. The person should receive a copy of any report provided by the second doctor.

If the second opinion confirms that the person is medically unfit to drive, the person should surrender their driving licence or otherwise make a commitment not to drive. If they are unwilling to do this, the doctor has a legal obligation to notify the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), who will review the issue and may consider it necessary to take away the licence.

Before notifying the NZTA, the doctor must explain the procedure to the person and advise exactly what information will be given to the NZTA.

If a person who has been assessed as unfit to drive does not give up their licence voluntarily, they may be visited at home by a member of the police and asked to hand over their licence.

Driving as a job

People who have had a stroke are generally not granted licenses for vocational driving, such as licenses for heavy vehicles or to carry passengers. In some cases a return to driving may be considered if there has been a full and complete recovery, or a license may be granted with conditions.