

This 4-page fact sheet is about driving and transport options after a stroke or a TIA. TIA is also known as Transient Ischaemic Attack, mini-stroke or warning stroke.



### Why can't I drive immediately after having a stroke or TIA?

Getting back behind the wheel to drive is usually a priority for a driver who has had a stroke or a TIA. **However after stroke or TIA you cannot drive for one month.** This initial stand down period is not based on the effects of your stroke but due to the risk of you:

- having another stroke or TIA or
- having a seizure or
- experiencing other neurological problems.

After one month you may be able to drive again, as long as your doctor agrees it is safe for you to do so.

### Legal Guidelines about driving after stroke in New Zealand

NZ Transport Authority summary regarding legal guidelines for returning to driving		
Medical condition	Type of licence: Cars and motorcycles Class 1 or class 6 licence and/or a D, F, R, T or W endorsement	Type of licence: Heavy vehicles Class 2, 3, 4 or 5 licence and/or a P, V, I or O endorsement
<b>Stroke</b>	Should not drive until clinical recovery is complete with no significant residual disability likely to compromise safety. <b>This should not be less than one month.</b>	Should not drive. Under some circumstances, the Agency may consider requests to resume driving from current licence holders.
<b>TIA Transient Ischaemic Attack</b>	<b>Should not drive for at least one month for a single TIA.</b> Individuals with multiple TIAs may return to driving after three months provided the condition has been adequately investigated and treated.	Should not drive for at least six months for a single TIA. Individuals who have multiple TIAs should not drive. However, the Agency may consider granting a licence where sound reasons to do so exist.
<b>Epilepsy after stroke</b>	<b>Should not drive for 12 months.</b> This may be reduced to a minimum of six months by The Agency subject to a supporting neurologist report.	Should not drive. However, the Agency may consider granting a licence to individuals who have been seizure free for five years and are not on any medication to control seizures.
<p><b>NZ Transport Authority can provide further information about returning to drive. Their centre is open Monday to Friday, 8am–6pm. Freephone number 0800 822 422.</b></p>		



## How stroke may affect your ability to drive

**During 60 minutes driving you make 70,000 decisions.** After a stroke your ability to make these decisions and drive safely can be affected in various ways. You may have physical or visual problems, or you may have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time or with making quick decisions. This section explains this in more detail.

**Physical effects** - weakness in your arm, leg or both is common after stroke. Other physical effects may include pain, changes in sensation, paralysis and muscle spasms.

**Problems with sight** – a stroke can cause a variety of problems with your sight. These include double or blurred vision, loss of central vision in one or both eyes and visual field loss.

**Cognitive effects** – driving requires many different cognitive skills. You must concentrate, navigate, multitask and make quick decisions. After a stroke you may have difficulty concentrating, understanding, solving problems, or making decisions. Your perception of space and distance may have changed, or you may have problems with your memory.

**Fatigue** – After your stroke you may find that you lack energy and feel extremely tired. This may affect your ability to drive.

**Epilepsy** – a small number of people have a seizure within the first 24 hours of their stroke, and some go on to develop epilepsy. This condition can affect your ability to drive.



## Recovery, rehabilitation and returning to drive

**Each person is affected by stroke in a different way. Some people can return to driving after a month and other people will take much longer. You may require a driving assessment to assess your ability to drive safely.**

**For people who are home again soon after their stroke or TIA:** Your GP will advise if it is safe for you to drive after one month. You may need further rehabilitation and a specialist driving assessment before you are able to drive again. Your GP or consultant will refer you to a specialist occupational therapist (OT) for assessment.

**For people who have extensive medical treatment and a significant time in rehabilitation after their stroke or TIA:** Due to the demands of driving it's suggested you wait about 6 months before adding driving to your rehabilitation goals. Rehabilitation team members will support and advise you about this. You will probably need to have a driving assessment prior to being given the all clear to drive.

OTs carry out these assessments. Your GP or consultant will advise you or you can phone OT New Zealand on 04 473 6510 for assistance.

## Adaptations and modifications to your car for driving

Even if you have physical disabilities following your stroke, it may be possible for you to drive. There are various vehicle adaptations and motoring accessories that can make driving possible and more comfortable. The OT who carries out your driving assessment will advise you about this.

Some people may be eligible for government support to assist in purchasing a vehicle and/or adaptations to their car. For more information contact your OT; or Accessable on phone 0508 001 002 if you live in Auckland/Northland; or Enable on phone 0800 171 981 if you live anywhere else in NZ.

## Transport options while you are waiting to drive again or if you are unable to drive

If you are unable to drive, you may feel that you have lost your independence and have to rely on others to get out and about. This is particularly hard if you live in a rural area or in places where public transport is limited. Talk to your family, whānau, friends and social support services about how you are feeling. They can help you to look at other options that will help you do things that are important to you – such as seeing friends and taking part in hobbies and community activities.

**Initially taxis may seem expensive, but owning a car costs a lot of money too. Running an older, small car can cost up to \$2500 a year (not counting the value of the car itself or its loss of value over time). That's a lot of taxi fares!**

## Services which may be available in your area



### Total Mobility Scheme – TMS

**The Total Mobility Scheme is a subsidised taxi service.** It works using vouchers or electronic cards that give a 50 per cent discount on normal taxi fares, up to a specified level. The purpose of the scheme is to assist eligible people with impairments to access appropriate transport to enhance their community participation.

In some areas the Stroke Foundation community stroke advisors are contracted to carry out the TMS assessment and register clients for TMS. There is usually a registration fee for TMS. Please contact your local Stroke Foundation to find out more or phone 0800 787 653.



### Mobility Parking Permit Scheme

With a Mobility Parking Permit (this card you put in the window of your car), you can use mobility car parks provided by councils, hospitals, supermarkets and other organisations. Most councils offer additional discounts on standard car parks. The permit is registered to an individual and can only be used when the permit holder is using the vehicle. For further details and help please phone 0800 227 2255.



### Public transport

Public transport may be an option for you. Companies have an obligation to provide transport which is easily accessible for people with disabilities. Services in each area vary. The best option is to contact your regional or local council or Citizens Advice Bureau on 0800 367 222 to find out what public transport is available if you're not sure.

Other useful numbers are Auckland public transport phone 09 366 4467; Wellington phone 0800 801 700; information from Weka about travel throughout NZ phone 0800 362 253.

## Shuttle services

Most District Health Boards provide a shuttle service which is helpful for getting to hospital appointments. Carers NZ has a list of all services, Helpline 0800 367 222. If it's easier ring your local hospital or your GP.

## Volunteer drivers

In some areas there are volunteer drivers who will take you to appointments or on outings. To find out if any volunteer driver services run in your area contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau on 0800 367 222.

**The Red Cross community transport programme** is available in some areas. Please ring your local Red Cross service centre to find out if this service is in your area or phone 0800 733 276.

## Companies providing driving and personal service

Some private companies provide driving and personal services. It is advised to get a quote for the cost of the service you are requesting and to find out how this is paid prior to agreeing to the service. The Stroke Foundation recommends you only use registered services. Here are two examples of driving companies: Driving Miss Daisy, phone 0800 948 432; and Freedom Companion Driving Services, phone 0800 956 956.

## Mobility scooters and battery-powered wheelchairs



Mobility scooters and battery-powered wheelchairs may be a good solution for staying mobile and independent. **There are many options for both scooters and wheelchairs. It is recommended that you get expert advice from an occupational therapist and trial a scooter or wheelchair before hiring or purchasing.** An OT can advise about the skills you need to use these and assess your readiness to drive them. Your GP will advise you about your local OTs or you can phone OT New Zealand on 04 473 6510.

NZTA requirements for using your mobility scooter or battery-powered wheelchair	
You don't need a driver licence to operate these mobility devices. They are not required to have a warrant of fitness or registration. But there are requirements for where and how you can use them.	
<b>On the road</b>	You must keep as close as possible to the edge of the roadway
<b>On the footpath</b>	You must ride carefully and be considerate of others
<b>On the footpath</b>	You must not ride at speeds that put other footpath users at risk

If you decide to purchase a scooter or powered wheelchair you may be eligible for a subsidy or grant from Lottery Individuals with Disabilities Fund. If you require any assistance with filling out the Request Form, please phone 0800 824 824 and ask about making a request to this Fund.

**Mobility scooters and battery-powered wheelchairs can increase your safety risks on and around the road. NZ Transport Authority has guidelines regarding their use and safety points to consider.**



## Walking

Walking is a great activity and exercise. Even when you get back driving it's good to keep walking in your daily activity plan and get out into the sunshine and fresh air. As you increase your walking time you may be able to get to your neighbours, to the shops, to the parks and to other activities in your community.

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand with support from Jane Gray, Occupational Therapist, Burwood Driving and Vehicle Assessment Service, Christchurch. August 2016.