



Keeping on the go: Driving safely as you age



Driving & stroke



Meet Ramman...

Ramman is 79 years old and has recently had a stroke causing limited movement in his right arm and leg. As a result, Ramman uses his left arm and leg to drive his vehicle. He's been asking himself:

Should I continue driving?

A person who has had a stroke is unable to drive for at least one month. A medical doctor decides if a person can resume driving.





How might a stroke affect safe driving?

The effects of a stroke are different for each person. Some of the effects of a stroke may interfere with your ability to drive. For example:

- **Vision:** You may experience changes such as double vision or reduced peripheral vision.
- **Visual-perceptual:** You may have difficulties recognizing objects.
- **Motor:** You may have difficulty controlling movements.
- **Sensory:** You may have difficulties sensing movement, touch or neglect one side.
- **Cognitive:** You may have impulsive behaviour, difficulties with judgement, memory changes or greater distractibility.





Warning signs of unsafe driving

- You have difficulty turning the steering wheel, applying the brake or gas pedal.
- You do not notice people or other vehicles on one side.
- You feel frustrated, angry or confused while driving.
- You have difficulty staying on your side of the lane or drift across lane markings, into other lanes.
- You find it difficult to think clearly about the traffic around you.
- You get lost in familiar areas.
- You have had several close calls or minor accidents.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to make some changes to your driving strategies or have your driving evaluated.





Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in some driving situations that are risky. Here are some strategies that can be used to reduce the risk:

Strategies to reduce the effects of a stroke on driving

- have regular medical checkups and ask your medical doctor about your ability to return to driving
- driver rehabilitation may be recommended to help you regain your driving skills
- vehicle modifications, such as a left-sided gas pedal may be recommended



General strategies

- choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats
- make sure your vehicle is in good working condition
- make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirror are properly adjusted
- limit driving at night, in bad weather, during rush hour or on limited access highways
- be careful when changing lanes, making a left-hand turn or merging into traffic
- maintain a safe following distance
- take breaks if you are driving a long distance
- have regular medical checkups



Getting help

- an occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate your driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help you find alternative transportation
- a driver information session or refresher course may be useful for your driving



Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel safe to drive or you may be told that you can no longer drive.



Here are some strategies to help you get where you want to go:

- plan ahead: planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving
- make a personal transportation plan:
 - collect information on local transportation options
 - check the blue pages or the Internet for local or regional transportation service providers and for government or community services for older adults that may offer transportation services
- become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options



Remember: Never be afraid to ask for help from family or friends.

Ramman's decision

Ramman had a formal driving assessment and is now receiving driver rehabilitation from an occupational therapist.

The occupational therapist recommended assistive technology for his car and is teaching him how to use it safely.

What strategies will you use?



RESOURCES



For more information
www.olderdriversafety.ca

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists: www.caot.ca

American Occupational Therapy Association: www.aota.org

Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists: www.aded.net

Canadian Automobile Association:
www.caa.ca

Canadian Stroke Network:
www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca

Heart and Stroke Foundation:
www.heartandstroke.com

Public Health Agency of Canada:
www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors

Seniors Canada: www.seniors.gc.ca



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