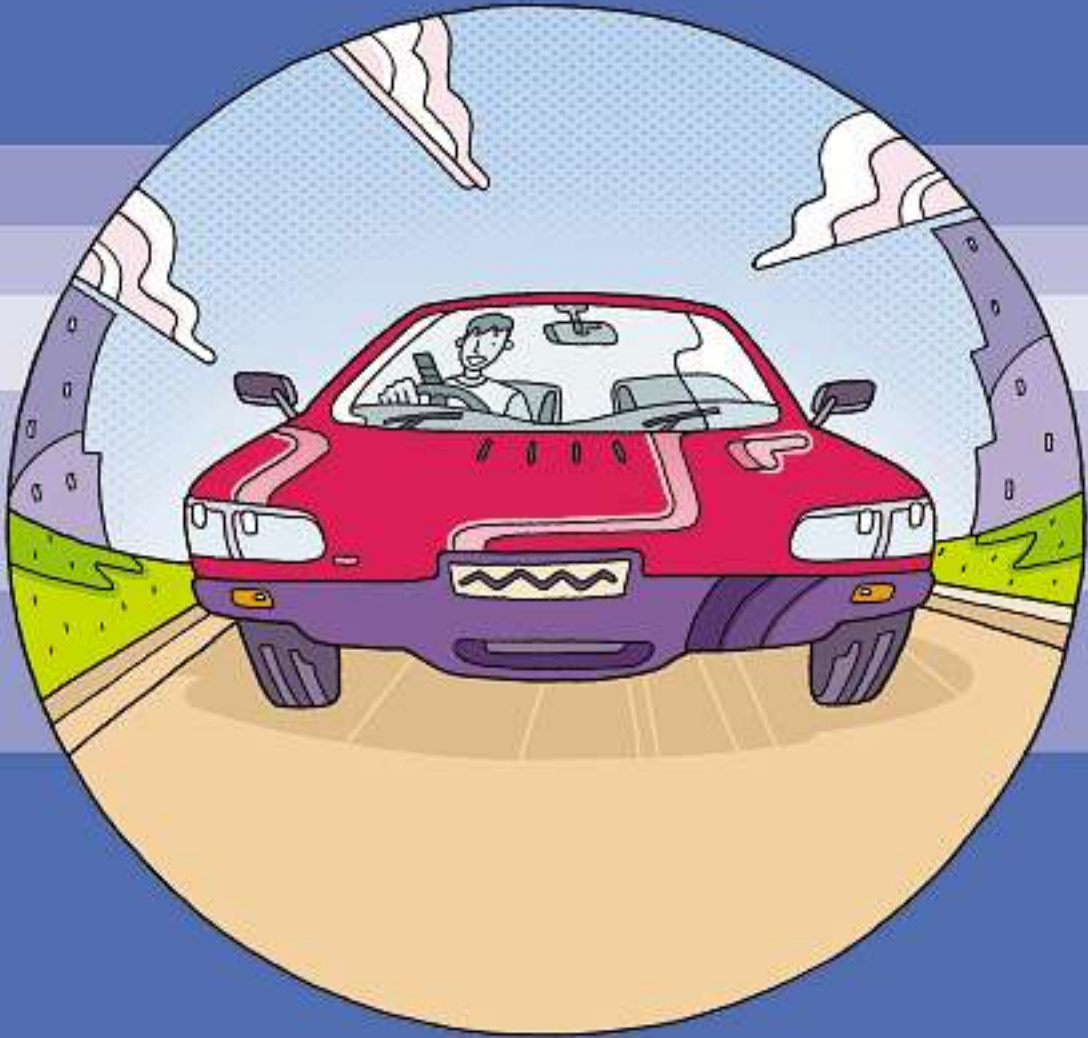




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Motoring after a stroke



Motoring after a stroke

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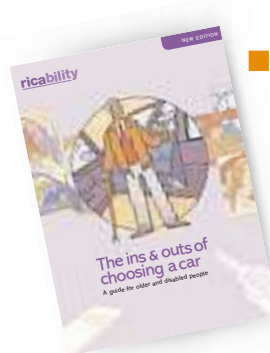
This booklet

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

With full or near-full recovery, you may well be able to drive with standard controls. This booklet should help you to choose a car with built-in features that will be easier to use. It also covers the specialist products and techniques which can overcome physical disabilities. At the back there are contact details for sources of expert advice.

Most of the products covered here are for driving and controlling a car. Product prices should be used for guidance only. If you can, shop around and talk to different firms as prices vary.

For more information, see the Ricability guides below. All are free and for the cost of postage only or see them at www.ricability.org.uk. They all include lists of where to go for further information, help and advice.



■ The ins & outs of choosing a car

Overview of the features that can help, tips on getting in and out of a car, ways of adapting a car to suit you.

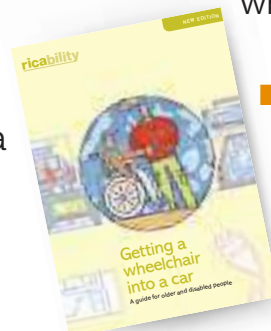
■ Car controls

In depth information on the types of adaptations and controls available and where to get them.



■ Getting a wheelchair into a car

Comprehensive information on hoists, racks and trailers and where to get them.



■ People lifters

Comprehensive information on devices that help wheelchair users to get in and out of a car and where to get them.



Driving after a stroke

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 ongoing problems, you *must* tell the DVLA. You must also tell them about any other medical conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes. If fits are controlled by medication, you will not be licensed to drive until you have been free of fits for a year, not counting any epileptic attacks you had within 24 hours of the stroke. You will probably be asked to complete a questionnaire and to give the DVLA permission to contact your GP or hospital consultant for more information.

You may be issued with a full licence, a time-limited licence (for later review) or with a licence to drive only automatics or vehicles that have been adapted.

The DVLA may require you to attend a Mobility Centre for a driving assessment – see *Plan of action* below.

You need to tell your insurance company of your stroke and of any special controls fitted to your car. And both the DVLA and your insurer need to be kept informed of any changes to your health or medication.

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

Effects of 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.

Physical effects commonly include weakness down one side of the body, affecting your arm, leg or both. Car adaptations can often overcome these problems: see below for summaries and our *Car controls* guide for more detail. Limb spasms can be controlled by medication and cars can be adapted so these won't affect the pedals. Only in severe cases will these stop you driving.

Sight can be affected by a stroke. Some eye conditions recover over time or you may learn to adapt to them – the DVLA will decide if this means that you can resume driving.

To drive you must be able to read a standard size number plate (with glasses or lenses if necessary) from 20.5 metres (67 feet) or 20 metres (65 feet) where narrower characters are used. If your visual field is restricted, you will need specialist assessment to check that it meets DVLA requirements. If it doesn't, you will not be able to drive.

Speech and language problems should not prevent you driving unless you have difficulty following road signs or learning to use adaptations.

A stroke can affect concentration, judgement, speed of thought, memory, perception and attention. These often improve and may clear completely. You need to be able to react quickly and to act logically when driving. If you can't, you may have to give up driving. A Mobility Centre can carry out a full assessment of your skills and advise on driving safely.

Choosing a car

Many people who have had a stroke will need automatic transmission and adaptations. If you want to keep your existing car, *Products and techniques* below, will help you decide if you can.

The following pointers should help you identify useful features on standard production vehicles. Remember that the less a car is modified, the higher its resale value.

When deciding on the type of car, think about your likely needs in future. 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.

Getting in and out

- easy door handles that you just pull on, without buttons or levers
- tall and wide door openings – doors on two-door cars are usually wider
- doors with a wide opening angle
- no sills or low, narrow sills
- conveniently placed handholds
- seat height that suits you
- electrically operated seats which go up and down, forwards and back – useful if you need space to get your legs in but you need to sit closer to the wheel for driving
- space around the seat
- plenty of leg and foot room
- no door pockets that get in the way

Locking and ignition

- remote and central locking
- keyless entry system – easier than using a key with your left hand

- remote start
- windows that close automatically when the car is locked

Primary controls

For steering, braking and accelerating

- automatic transmission. A must for most disabled drivers
- power assisted steering – on some cars the effort needed can be lightened by the dealership or by specialist converters
- cruise control to maintain a constant speed

Secondary controls

For things like the horn, lights and indicators – try to find a model where these are in the best position for you

- electric windows
- electric and heated door mirrors
- heated windscreen
- wipers which switch on automatically when it rains
- lights which switch on automatically when it gets dark
- easy controls for audio equipment
- parking sensor – sounds if you are near an obstacle
- reversing camera
- avoid or adapt ratchet type handbrakes which can be stiff if you have a weak hand and wrist

Boot or hatch

- no sill or low sill
- rear seats which fold flat by power
- hatch which opens by power
- internal boot/hatch release
- adequate space if you have a wheelchair.

Plan of action

1 Ask some basic questions.

Prepare to compromise as you may not find everything in one car. Think about what you may need in future.

Will you drive the car? Or will you be a passenger? Whichever, think about getting in and out and comfort. See *Products and techniques* below and our guide *The ins & outs of choosing a car*.

Will you need special controls?

There is a big range – from simple gadgets to more complex controls. See below and our *Car controls* guide.

What equipment will you carry?

Think about every day and occasionally.

Do you use a wheelchair? See below and our guides *Getting a wheelchair into a car* and *People lifters*. If you travel in your wheelchair as a passenger, a Mobility Centre can advise you about vehicle converters and adaptations that can be fitted.

2 Collect information. Start with articles in motoring magazines and the internet plus manufacturers' brochures. If you are disabled, other sources include:

Reviews by disabled drivers appear regularly in Motability's magazine *Lifestyle* and in the newsletters of disabled motorists' organisations.

Mobility Centres and organisations of disabled motorists give independent advice and provide a range of services (see p11). Mobility Centres can assess if you can drive

and find out what equipment may suit you. Assessments are free if you are referred by the DVLA and, at a few centres, by the NHS. Most charge £45 upwards. Adaptation firms can use the assessment report to help them find the most suitable equipment for you.

Mobility Roadshow (see p11) event with cars and adaptations; you can test drive vehicles there.

Motability (see p11) have a list of accredited car dealers with specialist knowledge and facilities for disabled people. A video on choosing a car, *Right first time*, is available from Motability (£3.99) or borrow it from an accredited dealer. Also see the Motability website for an interactive *Vehicle Suitability Guide*.

3 Try out before buying 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 tell you whether the adaptations can be fitted to your 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 below). Mobility Centres can provide details. Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car.

Products and techniques

Many drivers who have had a stroke are able to drive with only automatic transmission, power assisted steering and some simple adaptations.

If your friends or family also drive your car, make sure your adaptations do not prevent them doing so or do not get in their way unreasonably.

Getting in and out

If your main car key is small but full of electronics, fit a chunky holder on a spare key for more leverage. They cost about £5 and are available from general aids suppliers.

Having the door hinges modified and the seat runners extended will give you more space to get in and out of the car. It may be possible to have an existing seat converted – to be higher, made height adjustable, swivel or to be powered. Costs start at about £800 from adaptation firms. If swivelling helps, there are turning cushions (mostly between £20 and £80 from general aids suppliers) and replacement swivel seats, mostly from £700 upwards, from adaptation firms. To get in, sit first then turn and bring your legs in, doing the reverse to get out.

Wheelchair users If you have a manual wheelchair, you may be able to lift it into the back of the car and walk the few steps to the seats. However if you can't, there is a range of devices and techniques for getting you and the wheelchair into your car.

See:

Getting a wheelchair into a car for:

- hoists which lift a manual or powered chair into a vehicle
- rooftop hoists which winch a manual chair up and on to the roof of a car
- racks which carry a wheelchair on the back of a car
- trailers and ramps.

People lifters for:

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

Easifuel

A small plastic gadget that holds open the trigger on petrol pumps – useful if you have limited dexterity or the use of only one hand (£2.99; call 020 7582 1117 to try before you buy).

Primary controls

Steering Think whether you will be able to adequately control the steering wheel with both hands. If not it is likely you will need a steering ball or spinner so that you can steer one handed. This is best combined with power assisted steering. Sometimes if your left side is only mildly affected, you can use a spinner with the right hand while you change gear with the left.

Spinners come in several shapes to suit different types of grip and most cost between £30 and £80.



Changing gears This is likely to be easier with automatic transmission. To stop the car rolling back on slopes, you will need to use a handbrake or have an adaptation such as brake assist. If you cannot use a mechanical gear selector, there are systems which electrically set the gear for you, but these can be costly. It might not be worth adding them to an older vehicle. A Mobility Centre will advise you.



Pushbutton gear selector

Some cars have manual gears designed to be easy to use – such as nudging the gear stick – without having to use the clutch.

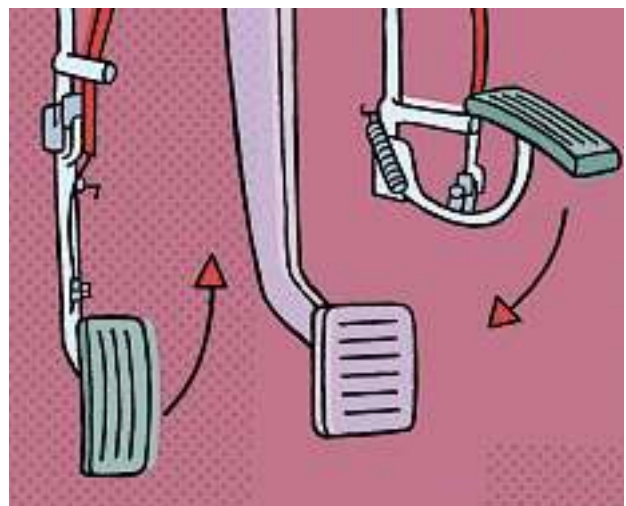
Pushbutton clutches have a touch sensitive switch mounted on the gear stick (around £1,000 to £1,500+). Some clutches work automatically as

soon as the gear stick is moved.

Types of semi-automatic clutch vary from mechanical levers to servo-assisted systems. All of these require manual dexterity so are best avoided.

If you drive an adapted manual car but your driving licence is for automatic vehicles only, you must make sure the clutch pedal is removed.

Accelerating and braking If your right leg is affected, the most likely solution for you will be to have an automatic car and a flip up left foot accelerator fitted on the left side of the brake pedal (around £300). The original accelerator can be flipped down so that the car can be driven conventionally by other drivers. It is recommended that a twin flip type is used so that when one accelerator is flipped down, the other moves up out of the way. You are strongly recommended to take driving lessons to learn to drive with a left foot accelerator, especially if you are in the habit of using your left foot to work the clutch.



Other equipment is available: footrests fitted and shaped to suit you (from £60); a guard to keep your foot from touching the pedals accidentally (most from about £80).

Hand controls Hand controls for the accelerator and brake are only rarely suitable for people who have had a stroke. See our *Car Controls* guide for more information.

Parking brake Bolt on attachments make using the brake easier. These include simple levers to take the effort out of pressing the release button and handles you pull to operate the whole brake. These mostly cost from £60. An alternative is electric brakes worked by push buttons. These vary in cost but are more expensive, from around £700.

Secondary controls

These are used for things like lights, indicators and horn. After a stroke it may still be possible for you to operate the indicators with your weaker hand if you have an extended indicator stalk fitted. It may help if you can combine these with rain sensitive wipers and light sensitive lights.

Otherwise it is often necessary to fit an infrared system which has easy to use switches for all secondary controls, including lights, horn, indicators and windscreen wipers. These systems can be fitted and adjusted to meet your particular needs. They are most commonly placed close to the steering wheel, but can be fitted elsewhere if

this would suit you better. Getting used to an infrared control can take practice as you need to find the right button by touch. Many do not have automatically cancelling indicators.



There are also bleeper and tone systems – you press just one button to control several functions by pressing until you reach the one you want. Voice control systems work by spoken command and are programmed to act on only your voice.

Prices of these vary widely depending on how complex the adaptations are and also on the type of wiring system your vehicle has. They start at about £750. We strongly recommend that you check the potential cost of any adaptation you are considering and its compatibility with your car with an adaptation specialist.

Other ways of driving

It would be very unusual for you to need any of the more complex adaptations described in *Car controls*, following a stroke. If you use a wheelchair and find transferring extremely problematic, you may find a vehicle adapted to be driven from a wheelchair useful, but the controls you need should be relatively simple.

Further information

Blue Badge scheme

Allows disabled people to park in restricted areas, but do read and follow the conditions of use carefully. Details from the Department for Transport Mobility and Inclusion Unit: 020 7944 2914; www.dft.gov.uk and follow Access for Disabled People link.

Hiring a car

There are a few adapted cars for hire. Lists of firms that supply them are available from Mobility Centres and from Tripscope (see p11).

Service call

For £9.95 (inc p& p) you can buy an infrared ServiceCall Transmitter to call for service at thousands of participating outlets, such as garages, banks and shops. This is particularly helpful when filling up at a self-service station. More information from www.service-call.net or call 0800 458 3008.

Finance

Listed below are the various ways you may be able to finance a car. See the Ricability guides for more information.

Cash – you may be able to negotiate a greater discount if paying up front.

Personal loan – lets you own the car from the start – flexible payment periods, during which you pay interest.

Hire purchase – you pay a deposit and repayments with interest, usually over two to five years, and own the car at the end.

Personal contract plan and lease purchase – you pay a deposit and monthly payments; at the end of the contract you can hand the car back or buy it at a prearranged price.

Motability – Contract Hire and Hire Purchase Schemes set up for disabled people, using the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement. May also be able to offer help in the form of a grant.

Charities – you may be able to get an individual grant from local charities (check your library for sources). Also The Stroke Association can consider making a welfare grant to cover the cost of a driving assessment.

Statutory sources – social services may be able to help you with costs if you do not get DLA. Or if you are in or applying for a job, try the Access to Work scheme; contact your local Job Centre.

VAT exemption – you do not pay VAT on adaptations, their installation, repairs nor maintenance. If you use a wheelchair or stretcher, you may not

have to pay VAT on the purchase price of an adapted car; information from HM Revenue and Customs.

Vehicle Excise Duty (Road Tax) – you don't have to pay this on your car if you get the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the DLA or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement; get an exemption certificate from the Disability Living Allowance Unit (08457 123456) or the Veterans Agency (0800 169 2277).

Car insurance – under the Disability Discrimination Act, insurers are not allowed to refuse disabled drivers insurance or charge extra without justifying evidence. Shop around for the best deal. Mobility Centres and organisations of disabled motorists have lists of companies that specialise in insurance for disabled drivers.

Helpful organisations

Brain and Spine Foundation

Freephone: 0808 808 1000
Email: helpline@brainandspine.org.uk
Web: www.brainandspine.org.uk

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

Different Strokes

Tel: 0845 130 7172
Email: info@differentstrokes.co.uk
Web: www.differentstrokes.co.uk

- National charity by and for young stroke survivors
- Information, support, exercise classes

Disability Benefits

Helpline: 08457 123456
Web: www.disabilitybenefits.co.uk

Disabled Drivers' Association

Tel: 0870 770 3333
Email: hq@dda.org.uk
Web: www.dda.org.uk

- Help and advice to disabled drivers and passengers; local groups

Disabled Drivers' Motor Club

Tel: 01832 734724
Email: info@ddmc.org.uk
Web: www.ddmc.org.uk

- Help and advice on mobility to disabled people

Disabled Living Foundation

Helpline: 0845 130 9177 (10-4)
Text: 020 7432 8009
Web: www.dlf.org.uk

- Advice and information on disability equipment

Disabled Motorists Federation

Tel/Fax: 0191 416 3172
Email: jkillick2214@compuserve.com
Web: www.freewebs.com/dmfed

- Umbrella organisation for disabled motorists' clubs; also independent membership available; provides information on mobility

DVLA

Tel (Medical Unit): 0870 600 0301
Web: www.dvla.gov.uk
In Northern Ireland:
Tel (Medical Section): 028 7034 1469
Web: www.dvlni.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

Freephone: 0800 559 3636

Email: enquiries@mobility-centres.org.uk

Web: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

- National information service on driving, devices and vehicle adaptations
- Location of all independent, accredited Mobility Centres

HM Revenue and Customs

Tel: 0845 010 9000

Text: 0845 000 0200

Web: www.hmrc.gov.uk

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

Magic

Freephone: 0800 240 241

Email: help@fordmagic.co.uk

Web: www.fordmagic.co.uk

- Information on cars, adaptations and general mobility queries

Mobility Roadshow

In England and Scotland organised by Mobility Choice

Tel: 0870 770 3222

Email: choice@gtnet.gov.uk

Web: www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk

In Northern Ireland organised by Disability Action

Tel: 028 9029 7880

Email: marketing@disabilityaction.org

Web: www.disabilityaction.org

- Free event with advice, demonstrations and test drives on cars and mobility products and services

Motability

Tel: 0845 456 4566

Text: 01279 632273

Web: www.motability.co.uk

- Schemes to finance your vehicle

REMAP

Tel: 0845 130 0456

Email: info@remap.org.uk

Web: www.remap.org.uk

- Voluntary engineers who design and manufacture devices when there is nothing else on the market

REMAP (Scotland)

Tel: 01294 832 566

Email: golderjohn@hotmail.com

Stroke Association

Helpline: 0845 303 3100

Email: info@stroke.org.uk

Web: www.stroke.org.uk

- Support and information for all affected by stroke
- Research, community services, welfare grants

Tripscope

Tel/Text: 08457 585641

Email: enquiries@tripscope.org.uk

Web: www.tripscope.org.uk

- Information and advice on travelling with a disability on public and private transport



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Ricability is a charity that researches and publishes information on products and services for older and disabled people

30 Angel Gate, City Road, London EC1V 2PT

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Fax: 020 7427 2468

Text: 020 7427 2469

E-mail: mail@ricability.org.uk

Web: www.ricability.org.uk

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