



Returning to Driving

Returning to driving is often a goal following a spinal cord injury. It is important to remember:

- Driving is a complex skill
- Driving is a privilege NOT a right
- Following SCI, many people are able to return to driving with modifications
- Modifications can be expensive and require certification
- 'On road assessment' is the gold standard for determining ability to drive

What does the law say?

Physicians are required by law to report to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) anyone who is *potentially* unsafe to drive (Highway Traffic Act, section 203). The Ministry will look at the information provided and decide on what action should be taken. If the MTO decides to suspend your license, you will receive a letter in the mail telling you the steps to take in order to get your license back. They may require the following:

1. A satisfactory medical report
2. A report from a specialist (e.g. ophthalmologist, neurologist)
3. A report of driving evaluation¹

Once this information is received, they will decide whether to reinstate your license, continue the suspension, or request further information. This process may take six weeks or more. You can appeal their decision by contacting them directly.

Ministry of Transportation Medical Review Section

www.mto.gov.on.ca

416-235-1773 or 1-800-268-1481

What does a driving assessment involve?

1. In clinic assessment (1.5 – 2 hours)
 - Medical and driving history
 - Vision
 - Strength, range of motion, sensation, coordination, reaction speed
 - Emotional (anxiety, depression, frustration tolerance)
 - Cognitive assessment (attention, perception, memory, judgment, insight)
 - Equipment review/needs
2. On road evaluation (45 min – 1.5 hours)
 - Driving performance
 - Ability to respond to feedback

¹Driving evaluation must be from a MTO recognized Driver Assessment Centre.
<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/dandv/driver/medical-review/eval-centres.shtml#wave>

Contact your Occupational Therapist for more information.

Created by: Jennifer Holmes, Chandy Green		Updated: 2011-03-01	
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Cost of a driving assessment: Ranges from \$475 - \$550 or more.

Who can return to driving

In general, people with complete injuries above C4 to C5 will not be able to drive. People with injuries below level C4 to C5 have the potential to return to driving. Generally, the higher the level of injury, the more modifications that are required.

When to return to driving

Talk to your rehab team to ensure the best time for the assessment. Going too early before you have maximized your rehab potential could result in expensive modifications that are not needed.

- Your condition should be stable
- Equipment needs such as your wheelchair should be finalized

Funding options

- If you were injured on the job or in a motor vehicle collision you may be covered through insurance (WSIB or MVA respectively)
- Ontario March of Dimes² is a charitable organization that offers up to \$15,000 every ten years for vehicle modifications and assessment costs if program criteria are met.

Vehicle Modification Programs

Various cities have services which offer vehicle modifications. Speak with your occupational therapist for other centres in Ontario and for further referral information.

Saint Elizabeth Health Care – Driver Assessment and Training Services

1140 Sheppard Ave West, Unit 4, Toronto, ON M3K 2A2

416-398-1035

www.saintelizabeth.com/page/driver-assessment-training

DriveAgain

2700 Dufferin Street Unit 44, Toronto, ON M6B 4J3

416-640-0292

www.driveagain.ca

Skill Builders Rehabilitation Centre

100 Bell Farm Road, Barrie, Ontario, L4M 5K5

705-727-0319

<http://www.skillbuildersrehab.com>

² http://www.marchofdimes.ca/dimes/people_with_disabilities_caregivers/programs_and_services/hvmp/

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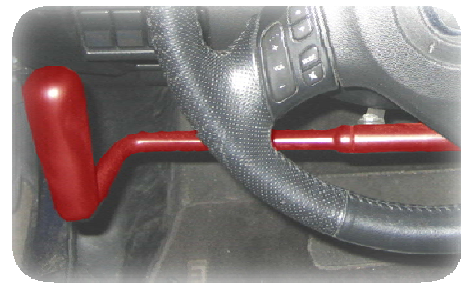
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Vehicle Modifications

Side Entry Van: Good for power wheelchair users where increased overhead clearance is required. Side entry allows positioning in the rear as a passenger, in the driver's position or as a front seat passenger. Rear entry vans are also available however you can only ride as a passenger in the back of the van. Rear entry vans can be easier to park in a garage or in non-accessible parking spaces.



Hand controls: Hand controls and a spinner knob are basic modifications for individuals that are unable to use their feet to drive. This system allows the individual to use their arms to control the brake and gas. Hand controls are relatively inexpensive (\$1,000-1,500).



Extensive vehicle modifications include:

- zero effort steering
- electric shifters
- keypad integration for gas
- keypad integration for brake.

In this picture, a wheelchair locking system has been mounted to the floor which secures the wheelchair into the vehicle. Such modifications can cost over \$30,000.



Remember: Assessment and modifications can be expensive and are not covered by OHIP. With insurance costs, gas, and vehicle maintenance driving can be more expensive than accessible transit options.

Tip: Be patient, returning to driving can be a long process (over 1 year) but can be well worth the effort for the independence and spontaneity driving can provide.

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