



Motoring after a brain injury

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This booklet is for people who have had a traumatic brain injury – *Motoring after a stroke* is another booklet in this series.

This information comes from consultation with people with multiple sclerosis and other experts. Product and price information comes from Rica's market research – use it as a guide only and shop around for the best price.

At the back, there is information, including addresses, about sources of funding and expert advice.

More detailed guidance on choosing and using a car can be found in the Rica guides shown here. Call us to request free copies or read them on our website:

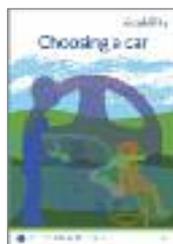
020 7427 2460

www.rica.org.uk

The website also has the **Car search** page that lets you search for cars by their measurements and will help you find a car to suit you.

Mobility address list

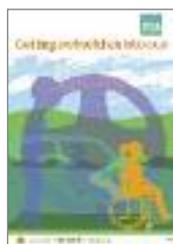
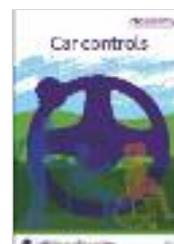
Addresses of all adaptation suppliers and car converters in the UK and details of the services they offer



Choosing a car

Details of features that may help you and ways of adapting a car

Car controls
Information on adapted controls for driving, the different types and how to get them



Getting a

wheelchair into a car

Information on equipment to help you stow or carry a wheelchair

Getting in and out of a car

Techniques that may help and details of equipment that is available



Wheelchair

accessible vehicles

Information on converted vehicles to carry you in your wheelchair

Family cars

Issues affecting families of disabled children and information about cars and standard and specialist equipment





Driving after a brain injury

A brain injury can be caused by an accident, an assault, an infection, a stroke or brain surgery. It can affect you in many ways and may affect your ability to drive.

It is essential to take your doctor's advice about whether you are fit to drive. You may also need to have an assessment, which will tell you if you are fit to drive and if you need any extra help.

EFFECTS OF A BRAIN INJURY

Driving involves judgement and thought as well as physical action. A brain injury can affect all of these and this may affect your ability to drive. A brain injury can:

- make it hard for you to **think**
- make it hard for you to **see**
- cause **epilepsy**
- cause **physical disabilities**.

Thinking

You may find it hard to:

- concentrate. You may be easily distracted, get muddled, or lose track
- remember things
- read the road or work out what is

happening. For example you may not notice a stop sign

- gauge things like speed and distance
- foresee the consequences of actions or situations
- react in time
- control your temper.

Seeing

Changes in your vision can include:

- blind spots or tunnel vision, so it's hard to see some areas without turning your head
- double vision
- jerky eye movements
- difficulty with your judgement of speed, distance and depth.

Often people with these problems don't know they have them. A specialist in sight, such as an orthoptist or ophthalmologist will need to assess and treat any visual impairment you have.

Epilepsy

Some types of injury mean there is a high risk of epilepsy, particularly if you have had brain surgery. If your injury puts you at risk, you will be told to stop driving for 6 months or a year, in case you have a fit. If you have had a fit, you are not allowed

to drive for a year afterwards. Medication can control fits, but if your medication is changed, you should follow your doctor's advice about stopping driving while you adjust to it.

Physical disabilities

A brain injury can cause physical disabilities. They can include:

- paralysis of part of the body
- loss of sense of touch
- less control over some movements.

You may have other physical disabilities too, particularly if you have been injured in a road traffic accident. Choosing a car with the right features or fitting the right adaptations can overcome these difficulties so you will very likely be able to continue driving. See the summaries below and our *Car controls* guide for more information.

DRIVING ABILITY ASSESSMENT

You may feel you can carry on driving after a brain injury but don't rush it. It can take time to recover and to find out what the long term effects of your injury are. You may have more of a problem than you know.

On the other hand, your family and friends may tell you not to drive when you can do so safely.

The most important piece of advice we can give is to get an independent assessment. A Mobility Centre (see page 10) can give you an assessment. This can cost up to £180 depending where you are. They will tell you:

- if you are safe to drive
- what you can do to make driving safer and easier

- where you can find specialist driving lessons
- where you can get specialist equipment
- where you can go for help with funding.

An assessment will also help make sure you are complying with the law about driving (see page 5).

If you can drive safely, the assessment will help you and your family feel more confident. If your injury means that you feel nervous about driving, they may advise you about how to build up your confidence.

If you are over-confident they may work out a programme which will help you understand how your driving has been affected and give you the skills to drive more safely.

DRIVING LESSONS

The effects of your brain injury may be lasting but any of them can improve with time. Most people keep many of the driving skills they had before the injury but they may still need specialist driving lessons. These will help you learn how to deal with the effects of your injury and how to change the way you drive. Be prepared for this to take time.

If you have never driven, your assessment will tell you if your injury is likely to affect your ability to learn before you take specialist lessons. If you can learn, the assessment will provide information that will help the instructor.

If you get or have applied for the Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of the Personal Independence Payment, you can apply for a driving licence when you are 16 so you can get mobile quicker.

LEGAL MATTERS

It is against the law to drive if you are not fit to do so. You must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) about your injury if your doctor advises you to or if you think it affects your driving.

They will assess your fitness to drive using the information you give them. They may contact your doctor – with your permission – and may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment. You may be:

- allowed to keep your licence
- given a temporary licence for one, two or three years
- given a licence to drive an automatic or a car with special controls
- told to stop driving for a short time or, in extreme cases, forever.

You can appeal if you do not agree with the DVLA's decision.

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

Take care

- **Make sure you tell your insurance company about your injury and about any special controls you use (or if you have to drive an automatic) – or you may not be covered.**
- **Do not make any fixed plans about finance for a car until the DVLA have confirmed that you can continue to drive – you could end up paying for a car you can't use.**

Plan of action

1 Ask some basic questions

Think about what you may need in future as well as about what suits you now. For more information see pages 6–8 and our other guides.

Will you keep your car or change it?

If your car is too difficult to use, you can adapt it or get a new one. If you're getting a new car, look for features that will make your life easier.

How will you get in and out? Do you need wide or high doors, or specialist equipment to help?

Will you be comfortable in the seat? Is it supportive? Can you sit without pain? Can you reach the controls?

Will you need specialist controls? There is a wide range – from simple gadgets to more complex controls.

What equipment will you carry? Think about everyday and occasional use.

Do you use a wheelchair?

2 Collect information

Start with motoring magazines and the internet plus manufacturers' brochures. You may also try the following:

- **Reviews by disabled drivers** in Motability's magazine *Lifestyle* and in newsletters of disabled motorists' organisations (see pages 10–11)
- **Mobility Centres** (see page 10) can assess your driving and find out what equipment may suit you. Charges vary from centre to centre (check with your local centre). Free in Scotland if you are referred by a GP. Free under Motability's Managed Adaptation Programme (only open to Motability customers).

- **Mobility Roadshows** (see page 11)
Visit one of these free events to see and try out vehicles and adaptations and other mobility equipment
- **Motability** (see page 11) have a list of accredited car dealers with specialist knowledge and facilities for disabled people. They have free guides, in print or on their website.

Find a car

- use Rica's online database of car measurements at www.rica.org.uk/car-search
- search for a particular seat height, wide doors, low sills or lots of headroom or look for a boot to fit your wheelchair

3 Try out before buying

Try 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 also tell you if the adaptations can be fitted to your chosen 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 page 8). Mobility Centres can help you find an instructor. Make sure that you are not driving with adaptations for the first time when you collect the car.

Products and techniques

GETTING IN AND OUT

The best way to get in is to sit in the seat first then turn and bring your legs in, doing the reverse to get out.

Look for the following features:

- **doors which open easily**
- **high and wide door openings – doors on two and three-door cars are usually wider**
- **no door sills, or low, narrow sills**
- **handholds you can use when getting in and out**
- **seat height that suits you**
- **seats that move up and down and back and forward easily**
- **plenty of space around the seat.**

If you need more space to get in and out, you can have the seat runners extended.

If swivelling helps, there are turning cushions (from £10 from general aids suppliers) and swivel seats, from £1,250. There are also swivel seats that lift and lower you out of the vehicle, from £5,800. Our guide *Getting in and out of a car* gives more information.

For any of these, contact adaptation firms in our *Mobility address list*.

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 front. However if you can't, there are devices and techniques for getting you and the wheelchair into your car. See our guide *Getting a wheelchair into a car* for more information on these.

LOCKING AND IGNITION

Look for the following features:

- **remote and central locking**
- **keyless entry system**
- **push-button start**
- **windows that close automatically when the car is locked.**

PRIMARY CONTROLS

For steering, braking and accelerating.

Look for the following features:

- **automatic gears – may make driving less stressful and tiring**
- **power steering**
- **cruise control to maintain a constant speed**
- **electronic handbrakes – can be helpful if you have a weak hand or wrist.**

Steering – You can fit a steering ball or spinner to the steering wheel to let you steer one-handed.

Spinners come in several shapes and sizes to suit different types of grip. Most cost between £10 and £110.



Steering wheel spinners from Alfred Bekker

Changing gears – This is very much easier with automatic transmission. This means fewer gear changes, but also helps with pulling away, especially in hill starts.

To change gear in a manual car, you have to use the gear selector with your hand, and the clutch pedal with your foot, both at the same time.

If you cannot use a mechanical gear selector, you can have an electronic system fitted, but these can be expensive. Take advice from a Mobility Centre before investing in one of these systems.



Electronic gear selector, from Adaptacar

Some cars have automated manual gear systems which work without using a clutch pedal. You move a lever to the right setting or push buttons or paddles on the steering wheel.



Gear controls on steering wheel

Adaptation firms can also fit a lever or button on the gear stick of a manual car that allows you to operate the clutch with the same hand as you use to change gear. These cost from around £1,975 but they may mean that you can continue driving a manual car.

Accelerating and braking – If the strength or control of your legs is poor, you may be able to have more brake assistance added to reduce the effort.

If your right leg is affected, you can fit a fold-up left foot accelerator, for around £400. Only one pedal should be down at any time. Driving in this way takes a lot of time and practice. Specialist driving lessons are **strongly recommended**.

Different types of hand control system can be fitted on an automatic car.

- Push pull controls combine acceleration and braking in one lever – mounted on the steering column or on the floor, from £400.



Jeff Gosling single lever accelerator and brake – here fitted with optional indicator switch

- Separate controls for the accelerator and brake give you more choice and may need less effort. An under ring accelerator (from £1,800) lets you steer with both hands. This is normally combined with a hand-operated brake lever, from £360.



Under ring accelerator, from Autoadapt

Parking brake – Mechanical attachments can make it easier to use the handbrake, from £70. Electronic parking brakes cost from around £700.

RSE Auto-brake can be fitted to a manual car to help with pulling away – ask your adaptation advisor.

SECONDARY CONTROLS

For controls like the lights and indicators. Try to find a model where these are in the best position for you. Also look for:

- **automatic wipers and lights**
- **parking sensors or cameras**
- **electric windows**
- **'take me home' headlights – stay on for a while after you get out.**

There are many simple attachments to make secondary controls easier to use and several systems which bring all the controls together. They can be adjusted to meet your individual needs. Prices vary depending on how complex they are and on the wiring system of the car.



Steering knob combined with wireless secondary controls, from Autoadapt

BOOT

Look for the following features:

- **no sill or low sill**
- **internal boot release**
- **powered boot opening/closing**
- **space for your wheelchair or scooter if you use one.**

RICA GUIDES

Getting in and out of a car

- hoists which lift and lower you on to a car seat
- lifting seats which swing in and out of the car, lowering and locking into a position to suit you
- wheelchair systems where a specially designed wheelchair slides into the car while you are sitting in it and becomes the car seat

Getting a wheelchair into a car

- hoists, lifts and ramps to help get a wheelchair or scooter into the boot
- boot and rooftop hoists which stow a manual chair in the car or on the roof once you are in your seat
- trailers and racks which carry a wheelchair on the back of the car.

Car controls

- primary and secondary control adaptations.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles

- WAVs let you travel in your own wheelchair or transfer inside the car.

Finance

Motability – Scheme for people receiving the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement (see page 11 for more information).

Access to Work – May help if you are working or about to start work. Go to www.gov.uk/access-to-work or ask at your Jobcentre.

Grants – To find a grant maker try:

- your library for local charities such as the Round Table or Lions Clubs
- Charity Search – helps people over 50 find a grant-giving charity: 0117 982 4060 (9am–3pm)
- Turn2Us: a website for people in financial need: 0808 802 2000 www.turn2us.org.uk
- contacting your local Headway group to discuss financial assistance.

VAT exemption on adaptations – You do not have to pay VAT on adaptations or their installation, repairs or maintenance. You may not have to pay VAT on the purchase and maintenance of an adapted car. Talk to your supplier or see information available from HMRC (see page 11).

Vehicle Excise Duty (Road Tax) – You don't have to pay this if you get the Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or AFIP. You claim the exemption when you apply for your tax disc. You will have to show evidence of your entitlement to the relevant benefit. See www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions/tax-disc-exemptions.

Car insurance – Under the Equality Act 2010, insurance companies are not allowed to refuse disabled drivers insurance or charge extra without justifying evidence. Shop around for the best deal. If you have a heavily adapted car, Mobility Centres and DMUK (see page 10) have lists of companies that specialise in insuring disabled drivers.

Further information

Blue Badge parking scheme

Allows disabled people to park in restricted areas, but do read and follow the conditions of use carefully. The scheme is administered by local authorities who deal with applications and issue badges.

For questions about the Blue Badge scheme contact your local council or the Initial Enquiry Support Service.

Tel (England) 0844 463 0213

Tel (Scotland) 0844 463 0214

Tel (Wales) 0844 463 0215

Email

bluebadge@northgate-is.com

www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Brain and Spine Foundation

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

Freephone 0808 808 1000

Email helpline@brainandspine.org.uk

www.brainandspine.org.uk

Disability Benefits Helpline

- government information service

Tel (DLA) 0345 712 3456

Tel (PIP) 0345 850 3322

www.gov.uk/disability-benefits-helpline

Disabled Living Foundation

- advice and information on disability equipment.

Tel 0300 999 0004 (10am–4pm)

www.dlf.org.uk

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Disabled Motoring UK

- self help organisation run by and for disabled people. It works to encourage and increase mobility. Membership £24 per year – includes monthly magazine.

Ashwellthorpe

Norwich NR16 1EX

Tel 01508 489449

Email info@disabledmotoring.org

www.disabledmotoring.org

DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency)

Drivers Medical Group

Tel 0300 790 6806

Fax 0845 850 0095

Email eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dvla-medical-enquiries

Northern Ireland: Driver & Vehicle Agency

Drivers Medical Section

Tel 0845 402 4000

Email: dva@doeni.gov.uk

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres

- national information service on driving, specialist equipment and vehicle adaptations – call the helpline or visit the website
- a network of independent, accredited Mobility Centres which will: assess your driving and give you advice about how to make it safer, easier and more comfortable; give advice to carers; in some cases, help you find a specialist driving instructor.

Freephone 0800 559 3636

www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Headway

- information, support and services to people with a brain injury, their families and carers
- national helpline and local groups
- publish a booklet *Driving after brain injury* – free to people with brain injuries or their carers.

Freephone 0808 800 2244

Email helpline@headway.org.uk

www.headway.org.uk

HM Revenue and Customs

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

Tel 0300 123 1073

www.gov.uk/hmrc

The Mobility Roadshow

- free events with advice, demonstrations and test drives on cars and mobility products and services.

Email info@mobilityroadshow.co.uk

www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk

Motability

- use your Higher/Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of DLA, PIP or AFIP, or your War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement to lease a car. Maintenance and servicing, insurance and breakdown assistance are included. Motability contribute towards the cost of adaptations
- you may have to make an advance payment to cover the cost of the car.

Tel 0300 456 4566

Textphone 0300 037 0100

www.motability.co.uk

Remap

- voluntary group of engineers who design and manufacture devices when there is nothing else on the market.

England, Wales and NI

Tel 0845 130 0456

Email info@remap.org.uk

www.remap.org.uk

Remap Scotland

Tel 01466 730 736

Email remap-scotland@btconnect.com

www.remap-scotland.org



Consumer research for older and disabled people

Rica is an independent research charity that publishes practical consumer information.

Tel 020 7427 2460
Email mail@rica.org.uk
www.rica.org.uk

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 facebook.com/RicaUK

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the brain injury association



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