

Returning to Driving after Brain Injury



Helping you through the steps towards driving after an Acquired Brain Injury

How can brain injury affect your ability to return to driving?

Driving is a very complex activity. To drive you need to be able to;

- Concentrate
- Be alert and react quickly
- Have good vision and be able to make sense of what you are seeing
- Remember the rules of the road and keep to them
- Understand road signs
- Be able to make decisions
- Be able to control your mood and remain calm
- Plan ahead for the journey and remember your route
- Have good coordination
- Have enough strength and muscle control to physically operate the car including changing gears, turning the wheel and operating pedals

These skills are all controlled by different parts of the brain and any of them can be affected by brain injury. The time it takes to recover these skills varies from person to person and sometimes full recovery does not happen.

Steps in Returning to Driving after Brain Injury

1. Seek medical clearance from your Consultant

You need medical clearance from your Consultant in the NRH before you return to driving. Most doctors recommend waiting at least 6-12 months after brain injury before starting to drive again.

Your Consultant will consider your recovery to date and other factors, including seizure activity, when making their decision.

Without medical clearance your car insurance is not valid following a brain injury.

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2. Complete an off-road driving assessment

It is often recommended to take a formal driving assessment prior to returning to driving. Your Occupational Therapist (OT) can assess if you have the skills needed for driving (physical skills, cognitive skills, visual skills). If any of these skills are affected, your OT may suggest a treatment programme to improve these skills before you go back to driving. Your Occupational Therapist can also advise you regarding applying for a disabled driving card and primary medical certificate.

3. Complete an on-road driving assessment

If appropriate, you will be referred by your Occupational Therapist (OT) for an on-road driving assessment which takes place in the hospital with a qualified driving instructor.

To participate in this assessment you will need a current driving licence. If necessary your OT will attend this assessment. The on-road assessment may take place over several sessions. Possible outcomes of on-road driving assessment may be;

- Return to driving automatic car
- Return to driving an adapted car (with adapted steering wheel or mirrors)
- Return to driving standard/manual car
- Further practice needed locally
- Recommendation to stop driving

If you are cleared to return to driving following assessment you will receive a letter of clearance to give to your insurance company.

4. Inform your insurance company

You must inform your insurance company that you have an acquired brain injury or it will affect your cover and future claims.

