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Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada is generously supported by individuals, corporations and employee groups. It is through the tireless dedication of donors that help is available for anyone affected by a brain tumour, including patients, survivors and their loved ones.

# Ask the Expert Information Sheet

## Driving After a Brain Tumour Diagnosis

By: *Jennifer Mason*

For many people, driving is one of their most valued activities. Whether someone is able to drive or not can impact all areas of their life including employment, how to get groceries, leisure activities, getting to a doctor's appointment and even where they choose to live.

When faced with the diagnosis and treatment of a brain tumour, a health care provider may assess if the tumour impacts an individual's ability to drive. According to guidelines set by The Canadian Medical Association, should a medical professional deem their patient is no longer able to operate a motor vehicle, then the individual's license is considered eligible for suspension.

Alternatively, a health care provider may choose to only advise a patient to no longer drive, rather than contact their province's motor vehicle regulatory body and recommend the patient's license be suspended. When this circumstance arises, it's important to know that automobile insurance policies may not cover accident costs for drivers who have simply been advised not to drive due to a medical condition.

Occasionally, a physician may refer their patient to an occupational therapist or other health care provider to further assess the person's ability to drive. There may also be a referral to a specialized driver-assessment program to further evaluate the impact of the brain tumour on driving ability. In these programs individuals are assessed for physical and cognitive changes and are taken on-road for a driving test. In some cases, particularly when the problems are related to physical functioning, there may be adaptations that can be suggested by these programs that will allow a safe return to driving.

### ***What impacts a health care professional's decision?***

There are a number of factors that health care providers consider when deciding whether someone should continue driving after the diagnosis and/or treatment of a brain tumour. A key aspect of this assessment is how the area of the brain has been affected by the tumour itself, as changes to vision, perception and/or thinking skills are common among brain tumour patients

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## Additional support, information and education offered by Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada:

Adult, Pediatric and Non-Malignant Brain Tumour Handbook available in English and French

“A Friend in Hope” children’s storybook available in English and French

20+ Adult Support Groups across Canada (in-person and virtual)

Toll-free information and support line

BrainWAVE Pediatric Support Program

Print BrainStorm Newsletter  
Email Newsletters:  
• E-BrainStorm  
• Peace of Mind

“Grey Matters” Blog

All patient resources are available free-of-charge in Canada. Call 1-800-265-5106 or visit [www.BrainTumour.ca](http://www.BrainTumour.ca) for additional details and information.

Other health changes that can impact a medical professional’s decision about a patient’s ability to drive include:

- Changes in physical abilities such as strength, sensation, or reflexes, particularly if the right leg or either arm is affected
- Difficulty concentrating, which can result from pain, emotional distress or fatigue, all symptoms commonly experienced by those living with a brain tumour
- Fatigue, which can be related to the effects of the tumour itself or can be a side effect of radiation or other treatments
- Medications, which often have side effects that impact the ability to drive safely. They can cause someone to feel sedated or overly stimulated and can cause changes in vision, strength, coordination or reaction time

With malignant tumours, physicians have to take into consideration that symptoms can get worse over time and how fast they progress can be difficult to predict. In these cases, patients may proactively decide to stop driving in light of safety concerns for themselves and others.

Finally, brain tumours may cause a seizure disorder which can result in a license suspension due to medical status. Most often an individual who develops a seizure disorder must be seizure-free for a full year before they are allowed to drive again.

### **Looking ahead**

While the challenge of not having a driver’s license can feel like a loss of independence, it is important to remember that license suspension is common for brain tumour patients to experience, and that you may be eligible to get your license back after a period of time.

Learn more about factors that impact driving with a brain tumour by speaking with your health care team and/or consulting a representative at your local Ministry of Transportation office.

### *About the Author:*

*Jennifer Mason is an occupational therapist with the Driver Assessment Program at Capital District Health Authority in Nova Scotia. CDHA provides health programs and services to nearly half a million Nova Scotians from West Hants to Sheet Harbour, including Halifax Regional Municipality. Jennifer is also a member of the Professional Advisory Group, a team of volunteers who provide expert advice and support to Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada volunteers, committees and staff. This important group helps to ensure that all of the organization’s brain tumour information is reliable and current.*



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205 Horton St E  
Suite 203  
London, Ontario  
N6B 1K7

☎ 519.642.7755  
1 [800] 265.5106  
☎ 519.642.7192  
[www.braintumour.ca](http://www.braintumour.ca)

