

## Driver Evaluations

Getting behind the wheel of an automobile and hitting the open road is one of the top three things that most individuals who have experienced a traumatic brain injury have indicated that they want to be able to do again. Being able to drive gives individuals a sense of independence and a sense that they are still able to make their own decisions in life.

Following a traumatic brain injury, there are many things to consider before making a recommendation for an individual to participate in a pre-driving screening and an on-the-road assessment. Clinicians must consider the individual's functional abilities, age, visual acuity, visual perception, processing speed, reaction time, and their overall cognition.

### Who can participate in a screening?

Any individual who has sustained a traumatic brain injury and was able to drive prior to their injury or accident is eligible to participate in a pre-drivers screening. Also required is a recommendation from the treating therapy team, if the individual is in treatment, and his or her neuropsychologist. In addition, a prescription from the individual's treating physician who provides clearance for them to participate is also required.

Screenings are a service provided by Functional Recovery, a division of Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, as part of its overall mission of integrating individuals back into the home and community after suffering a traumatic brain injury. These pre-screenings typically take place once the individual has met their maximum physical and cognitive potential. It is typically an occupational therapist who provides the pre-screening evaluation and a pre-certified drivers educator who performs the on-the-road assessment and training if necessary.

### What is tested during the screening?

There are several components to the pre-driving evaluation:

- **Mini-Mental** tests the individual's orientation, short-term memory, visual memory, delayed short-term memory, verbal memory, and attention span.
- **Motor-free visual perception-vertical** is a test of short-term memory and scores the recall of visual symbols, visual sequencing ability, visual association skills, visual-motor ability, visual integrative ability and symbol-integration skills.
- **Reaction time** tests the individual's ability to react to alternating green and red lights while pressing an accelerator or brake pedal on a computerized testing device.

- **Visual acuity**

**test** is used to determine the smallest letters the individual can read on a standardized chart or card held 14-20 feet away.

Abnormal results may be a sign that the individual needs glasses or contacts

or may mean they have an eye condition that needs further evaluation by a doctor.



Overall, if an individual is able to pass each area of the assessment as listed above, they are eligible, as recommended by the occupational therapist, to participate in the on-the-road driving assessment.

It is important to recognize that modifications can be made to vehicles to allow individuals with physical and visual impairments the ability to resume driving. It is also important to note that an individual's functional ability behind the wheel of a car may differ from the pre-driving assessment results, and conversely, the individual who does not do well with the pre-screening may do well on the road.

If individuals express the desire to drive, they should be given the opportunity to participate in the pre-driver's screening evaluation. ❖

*Editors Note: Functional Recovery is a division of Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers which offers home- and community-based rehabilitation services for adults, teens and children throughout Michigan.*

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