

Some drivers with dementia absolutely refuse to give up their cars. For their own safety, they may require active intervention to prevent them from driving, including hiding the keys, disabling or hiding the car, or selling the car itself.

Resources for Assessing Skills

- State Motor Vehicle Departments can review a person's ability to drive. Family members can trigger a reevaluation by the state licensing office.
- VA Medical Centers often have staff available to evaluate skills of a driver with dementia. Ask your primary care provider to request a screening.
- Community organizations in your area may offer a driving skills evaluation program. Check with the Association of Driver Rehabilitation Specialists. 1-800-290-2344 There is usually a fee for this service.

Identification Cards

- All states provide identification cards to non-drivers. These are similar to a driver's license and can be used for identification purposes.

Finding Transportation Services

Families and friends are often willing to assist with transportation needs, if asked.

Specialized transportation targets groups such as the disabled or elderly. Such services can provide the supervision and personal assistance often required by persons later in the disease. Check with the Area Agency on Aging for assistance at 1-800-677-1116.

Public transportation, including city buses, taxis, and specialized vans, may be an option for those with mild dementia. For most older and disabled people there are special fares that make this an attractive option.

DRIVING & DEMENTIA



This information is provided as a service by:



Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Medical Inspector

Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Medical Inspector &
Geriatrics and Extended Care Strategic Healthcare Group
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

The family of a person diagnosed with dementia must act upon many issues: medical, legal, financial, and social. Of all these, driving is the one that must be confronted most immediately. The dementia patient operating an automobile may put him or herself and others at risk.

This guide helps persons with dementia and their families as they consider safety and driving risk. It provides suggestions for monitoring, limiting, and stopping driving.

While medical care can help manage dementia, it cannot cure it, and eventually individuals with the disease must stop driving. However, there is no easy answer as to when this decision must be made.

Difficulties

American life is built around the car: distances between home, work, shopping, and school are measured in miles, not blocks. More than just getting around, driving has an emotional component. It represents competence, independence, and freedom: drivers have choices that nondrivers lack. Drivers with dementia often change their driving patterns,

driving only during daylight hours, for instance, or driving only on familiar routes to keep using their cars as long as they can. It is hard to quit driving, but quitting is something they and their families must consider sooner or later.

Warning Signs

- Getting lost in familiar places
- Near misses
- Moving violations or warnings
- Crashes
- Confusing brake and gas pedals
- Incorrect signaling
- Trouble making turns
- Driving in a wrong lane
- Confusion at exits
- Parking poorly
- Hitting curbs
- Driving too slow or too fast
- Reacting slowly
- Not seeing danger early enough
- Being angry while driving
- Not obeying traffic signs

It is important for family members to pay attention to these driving behaviors and take the wheel if necessary. If the warning signs persist on other trips, the family should discuss the dangers with the driver, other relatives, and the health care

team to decide whether further monitoring, limiting the driving, or giving the car up entirely is appropriate.

Easing the Transition

It is best to start such discussions early in the disease before any warning signs appear. This allows the person with dementia to participate fully in the plans before the disease makes such participation difficult, and it allows the whole family to look into transportation alternatives and become comfortable using them while it is still a choice and not a necessity.

Short-term counseling can help some mildly impaired persons understand their driving problems as well as helping them cope with their very real sense of loss.

As the disease progresses, many persons actively resist making changes. They may require more direct approaches. Meeting with respected figures such as doctors, lawyers, or police officers can help. Written instructions may be necessary to reinforce the message that the driver should not drive.