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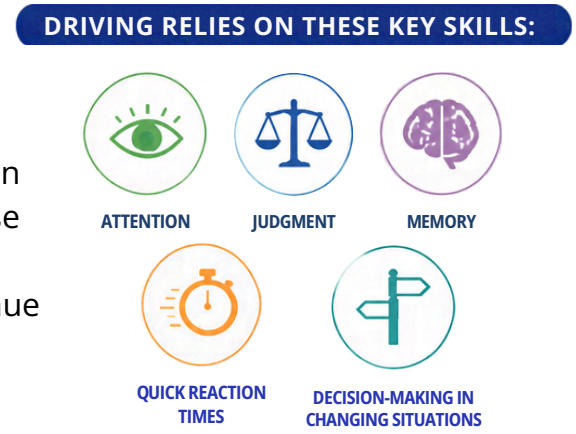
Dementia and Driving

A Guide to Knowing When It's Time to Stop

Driving often represents freedom and independence. When Alzheimer's disease or another dementia affects driving, families may struggle with when to step in and how to start the conversation. Recognizing changes early and planning alternative transportation can help protect safety while preserving dignity.

How Dementia Affects Driving

Safe driving depends on attention, judgment, memory, quick reaction times, and the ability to make decisions in changing situations. Dementia can gradually affect these skills, even when a person still knows how to operate a vehicle. Some individuals in the early stages may continue driving safely for a period of time, but as the disease progresses, driving will eventually become unsafe.



Driving Warning Signs to Take Seriously

- Getting lost in familiar places
- Forgetting where they are going
- Missing traffic signs or signals
- Making unsafe or slow decisions at intersections
- Drifting between lanes or hitting curbs
- Misjudging the speed or distance of other vehicles
- Confusing the gas and brake pedals
- Becoming unusually confused, frustrated, or overwhelmed while driving
- Returning much later than expected from routine trips
- New dents, scratches, collisions, or near misses
- Passengers expressing concerns about safety

Important: Do not wait for an accident to occur before taking action. If dangerous driving behaviors are present, arrange alternative transportation and seek professional guidance right away.



How to Begin the Conversation

Begin Early
Begin discussing driving early, while your loved one can participate in planning. Choose a calm time and a person they trust to lead the conversation.

Use Specific Examples
Describe what you have noticed without blame: "You seemed unsure which lane to use at the intersection yesterday, and I'm concerned about your safety."

Acknowledge the Loss
Giving up driving can bring sadness, anger, or fear of becoming dependent. Listen to those concerns and recognize how much driving means to them.

Focus on Staying Connected
Talk about how they will continue visiting friends, attending church, shopping, and doing activities they enjoy.

Involve the Healthcare Team
A physician can review health conditions and medications, discuss driving safety, and determine whether a professional driving evaluation is appropriate.

Expect Several Conversations
Because dementia can affect insight and memory, one conversation is rarely enough. Keep discussions calm, simple, and consistent.

Conversation Starters:

When concerns first arise:
"I know driving is important to you. I'm concerned about the changes we've noticed, especially [specific example]. Let's talk with your doctor about whether a driving evaluation would help. We can also make a plan so you can keep going to the places that matter to you."

When driving is no longer safe:
"I know this is hard. The evaluation showed that driving is no longer safe. I'll help you get where you need to go. Let's plan your rides for this week."

Getting a Professional Driving Evaluation

A driving rehabilitation specialist can assess how changes in vision, physical abilities, attention, memory, and judgment affect driving. A comprehensive evaluation may include both clinical testing and an on-road assessment.

An evaluation offers guidance about current driving ability. Because dementia progresses, someone who is cleared to drive may still need follow-up evaluations.

This information supports family planning and conversations. Individual driving decisions should involve the person's health care team and, when appropriate, a qualified driving rehabilitation specialist.