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Driving Safety and Alzheimer's Disease

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In the early stages of [Alzheimer's disease](#) or [other types of dementia](#), some people are able to keep driving. But as memory and decision-making skills get worse, at some point it will no longer be safe to be behind the wheel. It's important to start thinking about when a person should give up driving. By planning in advance, you will have time to prepare and explore other transportation options.

Driving with Alzheimer's Disease



When should someone with dementia stop driving?

People with some memory loss may be able to drive safely sometimes, but they may be unable to react quickly when faced with a surprise on the road. Good drivers are alert, think clearly, and make good decisions quickly. When

someone with Alzheimer's is not able to do these things, it's time to stop driving.

Other people with memory loss may be able to drive short distances on local streets during the day but unable to drive safely at night or on a freeway. If this is the case, limit the person's driving timeframes and distances.

Consider planning ahead, before the signs of unsafe driving appear, for how you will approach the situation.



What are the laws about dementia and driving?

State laws vary regarding when a person with Alzheimer's should stop driving. Some states will automatically revoke a license when a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. Other states may offer the chance for a diagnosed person to take and pass a driving test.

Many states require retaking a driving test when there is reason to believe someone may be unable to safely operate their vehicle. Information on unsafe driving can come from law enforcement, medical personnel, concerned citizens, and family members. A few states require physicians to report any diagnosis of dementia to the state's department of motor vehicles (DMV). Check with [your state's DMV](#) for more information.

Signs of unsafe driving by someone with dementia

People with dementia often do not realize they are having driving problems. Family members and friends will need to carefully observe the person's driving for signs that it's no longer safe for them to drive.

Signs that the person should stop driving include:

- New dents or scrapes on the car or multiple near misses or crashes
- Two or more traffic tickets, minor accidents, or increased car insurance premiums
- Confusing the brake and gas pedals
- Speeding or driving too slowly
- Sudden lane changes or other poor decisions in traffic
- Taking a long time to run a simple errand and not being able to explain why, which may indicate the person got lost
- Other health issues that might affect driving, such as changes in vision, hearing, and movement
- Comments from neighbors or friends about unsafe driving
- Recommendations from a doctor to modify driving habits or quit driving
- Failing a driving test or other driving evaluation

Evaluating driving skills

Friends and family members are often first to notice the signs of unsafe driving. Another way to evaluate driving skills is to have the person's driving skills assessed by a professional. The American Occupational Therapy Association maintains a [national database of driving specialists](#), or you can check with [your state's DMV](#) or a health care professional to recommend someone who can evaluate driving skills. Note that there may be fees associated with these types of assessments.

What to do when driving becomes unsafe for a person with dementia

The person will need to stop driving when doing so becomes unsafe. Some people with dementia decide on their own to stop, while others do not want to give up driving. If the person keeps driving when it is no longer safe, someone could get hurt or be killed.

Here are some ways to help stop people with Alzheimer's from driving:

- Talk about your concerns with the person. Find tips on [talking with someone about no longer driving](#).

[Read and share this](#)

- Take them to get a driving test or other driving evaluation or risk screening for older adults at your state's department of motor vehicles.
- [Ask the person's doctor](#) to tell them to stop driving. The doctor can write "Do not drive" on a prescription pad and you can show this to the person.
- If necessary, hide the car keys, disable the car, move it out of sight, or consider selling it.

[infographic](#) to spread the word about how older adults can stay safe on the road.

Finding other transportation options for people with dementia

Losing the ability to drive can be difficult, but driving is only one form of transportation. You can find other options for a person with dementia to travel safely around their community. Find out about services that help people with disabilities get around. These may include free or low-cost buses, taxi and similar private transportation services, or carpools for older people. Some churches and community groups have volunteers who take seniors wherever they want to go.

Contact your local Area Agency on Aging, or you can call 800-677-1116 or search the [Eldercare Locator](#) online for more information. You also can try searching [Rides in Sight](#) or calling 855-607-4337. This service of the nonprofit organization ITN America provides information about transportation options for older adults.

You may also be interested in

- Learning more about [safe driving for older adults](#)
- Exploring the [do's and don'ts of communicating with a person who has Alzheimer's](#)
- Reading about [home safety and Alzheimer's](#)

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NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

800-438-4380

adear@nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for

families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

eldercarelocator@USAgings.org

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

202-638-5944

info@aaaafoundation.org

<https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/senior-driver-safety-mobility>

www.aaaafoundation.org

AARP

888-687-2277

877-434-7598 (TTY)

member@aarp.org

www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety

Family Caregiver Alliance

800-445-8106

info@caregiver.org

www.caregiver.org

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