

ABOUT YOU... DRIVING

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, this Help Sheet may be useful. It provides important information about driving and dementia.

Driving is a highly complex task that involves interaction between the brain, eyes and muscles. Dementia can affect driving ability in a number of ways, including:

- Finding your way around
- Remembering which way to turn
- Judging the distance from other cars and objects
- Judging the speed of other cars
- Reaction time
- Hand-eye coordination

Should I continue driving now?

A diagnosis of dementia doesn't necessarily mean that you need to stop driving straight away, however you will need to stop driving at some point.

You are required by law to tell your local licensing authority of any medical condition that might affect your ability to drive safely. Dementia is one of the medical conditions that needs to be disclosed because it affects driving ability.

The licensing authority will ask you to see a doctor who will assess your medical fitness. After this, you may need a formal driving assessment. Based on the results of these assessments, the licensing authority will decide if you can continue to drive.

If the licensing authority decides that you can continue to drive you will be issued with a conditional licence. Conditional licences are valid for a maximum of 12 months, after which time you will be reassessed.

Sometimes restrictions may also be placed on your licence. These restrictions might be that you can only drive close to home, or at certain times or below certain speed limits.

If you do not notify your licensing authority of your diagnosis, or if you continue to drive after your licence has been cancelled or suspended, there can be serious consequences. If you are in a crash you could be charged with driving offences or be sued. Your insurance company may not provide cover.

Changes in your ability to drive may mean that you need to get a driving assessment, or in some cases stop driving immediately. The following checklist may help you notice whether any changes are taking place.

When driving do you:

- Need direction?
- Become lost in familiar areas?
- Confuse left and right?
- Make slower decisions at traffic lights, intersections or when changing lanes?
- Have difficulty interpreting traffic signs?
- Drive more slowly?
- Take longer to react?
- Have difficulty responding to the unfamiliar?
- Drive on the wrong side of the road?
- Change lanes inappropriately?
- Violate traffic laws?
- Cause damage to the car which you are unable to explain?

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- Use the accelerator and the brake at the same time?
- Brake at the wrong time on main roads?

Even if you have not noticed any of these changes, you might like to ask a friend, family member or local driving instructor what they think about your driving skills.

The most important thing is your safety and the safety of others.

Giving up driving

At some point you will need to reduce and stop driving. Many people decide to give up their licence voluntarily. Doctors will sometimes recommend that a person should stop driving.

Some people find giving up driving very difficult. Your car may be an important part of your independence, and without it your life may change.

You may feel angry, frustrated or upset about this change. Talking about these feelings, or asking a trusted family member, friend or Alzheimer's Australia counsellor for support and information may help.

Some people find that there are benefits in no longer driving. The alternatives can be less stressful than driving, the costs are less than those needed to run a car and the scenery can be enjoyed along the way.

Alternatives to driving

If you can reduce the need to drive and find alternatives for getting around you may find giving up driving less stressful.

Things to try:

- Asking a family member or friend to give you a lift
- Using buses, trains or taxis
- Walking
- Using community transport if it is available in your area. Check with your local council
- Use home delivery services for food and medical prescriptions and from your local library

When you stop driving, you might find it harder to make social trips like visiting friends or family, attending functions or participating in hobbies. Try to keep doing these things.

Other resources

For more helpful information on dementia and driving visit fightdementia.org.au

Reducing the need to drive and finding alternatives for getting around will help you stay active, mobile and socially connected.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at fightdementia.org.au



Interpreter

For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**