

Driving and dementia

All drivers are required by law to notify the Department of Transport of any medical condition that may affect their ability to drive safely. A diagnosis of dementia is a mandatory reporting condition.

This does not necessarily mean you have to stop driving straight away, however because the condition involves a gradual decline in cognitive and physical ability, you will need to stop driving at some point. Drivers will need to be regularly assessed by a health professional to determine their fitness to drive. For more information please visit the Department of Transport website.

Keeping safe while you are still driving

If your GP and/or licensing authority decides that you can continue to drive, there are many adaptations to allow you to keep you safe in the car and on the road including:

- » Swap to a small car that parks easily
- » Don't drive self-locking cars - or if you do have one, disable the setting
- » Know exactly where you need to go and don't deviate from the route
- » Use a GPS device such as Google Maps in the car, especially if you're going somewhere unfamiliar
- » Download a 'find my car' app on your smartphone in case you lose your car

- » Avoid driving at night
- » Avoid busy roads, freeways and busy intersections
- » When possible, try not to drive alone. Having someone in the car can be helpful.

How to assess driving capacity

Be alert for signs that your driving skills may be slipping. 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.

Here's a checklist that may help you decide whether any changes are taking place:

When you are driving, do you:

- » Need directions?
- » Drive slower than usual?
- » Drive on the wrong side of the road?
- » Confuse left and right?
- » Become lost in familiar areas?
- » Have difficulty interpreting traffic signs?
- » Take longer to react?
- » Change lanes inappropriately?
- » Cause damage to the car which you are unable to explain?
- » Use the accelerator and the brake at the same time?
- » Brake at the wrong time on a main road?

Starting conversations about driving

If you have concerns about a person's ability to drive, it is important to speak to them directly or their doctor as soon as possible. Be mindful that giving up driving can be very difficult for many people, so actions such as hiding keys or their driver's licence, or disabling the car may be disrespectful to the person living with dementia.

Here are some tips to get the conversation started:

- » Start the conversation when everyone is calm, rather than during or following a driving incident
- » Have short and frequent conversations rather than one long discussion
- » Acknowledge that giving up driving is hard to do but everyone has to stop driving at some point
- » Focus on the financial benefits of selling the car/saving on petrol and upkeep
- » Be respectful of how the person with dementia will be feeling.






Alternatives to driving

Reducing the need to drive and finding alternatives for getting around will help your loved ones stay active, mobile and socially connected. When people stop driving it is easy to stop making social trips, visiting friends, attending functions or participating in hobbies.

Tips for carers to consider:

- » Offer to drive to appointments, social gatherings and shops and services
- » Ask family and friends to assist with transport
- » Encourage the use of public transport, ubers and taxis
- » Encourage walking - please see our helpsheet on [Dementia and Walking](#) for more information.

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