

Monitoring Driving



Information from Southern Mobility and Alzheimer Society of Ireland websites

Driving represents independence, integrity, confidence and also provides a means to access necessary services, social interaction with friends, family and community. Loss of driving can result in isolation, distress, lowered self esteem and can contribute to other social and health issues.

There are common changes in later life that may affect the person's ability to drive e.g. a decrease in reaction times, fatigue. Older adults who do not have dementia are often able to assess these changes and regulate their own driving. With dementia an individual's capacity to assess his or her abilities may diminish.

This information is intended to provide advice, support, guidance and to create awareness around dementia and driving.

Insurance and Licence

When a diagnosis of dementia is made the insurance company should immediately be notified. They will advise on what action is required. Failure to disclose this information may affect the validity of the policy.

It is also your responsibility to tell the National Driving Licence Service (NDLS) about your diagnosis. You need to do this in person, and they recommend that you make an appointment.

Monitoring / Limiting / Discontinuing

Driving should first be monitored by families, then limited and then discontinued when deemed unsafe.

Monitoring

Suggestions:

- Create opportunities to observe the person with mild dementia when driving
- Keep a written record of observed driving behaviours (warning signs listed on page 3)
- Involve the person with dementia in open conversations and decisions regarding their driving (if possible). Share opinions with other family members and the GP.
- Consider circumstances and decide a course of action.

Limiting

- For persons with dementia driving is best reduced over time rather than all at once, where possible.
- At the early stages of dementia, having established the person is driving safely, consider and eventually implement driving restrictions. This may help the transition to ceasing driving in the future.
- Some of these restrictions may include:
 - Driving on familiar routes
 - Shorter journeys
 - Avoiding night driving
 - Avoiding rush hour

- Avoiding driving in bad weather
- Avoiding complicated busy junctions where possible
- Supervised driving is sometimes recommended / suitable whereby a passenger provides company, security, or gives directions. (However where the passenger has to give instructions on “how to drive” safety is majorly compromised - in hazardous situations there will not be enough time for the passenger to foresee the danger, give instructions and for the driver to respond quickly enough to avoid an accident)
- Having discussed and agreed these restrictions, involve others in doing some of the driving to ease the transition from driver to passenger. Ask friends, neighbours, relatives to drive to events, appointments etc – often people will be willing to help but may not think to offer.
- Use public transport more regularly, if possible
- While caregivers decide ways to reduce the need to drive, it is important to remember the social benefits the person with dementia derives from interacting with others. Plan well and avoid allowing one person to arrange/decide the strategies.



Discontinuing

- Some people with dementia decide independently that they no longer want to drive. Others need varying degrees of encouragement from family members, other carers or friends.
- Some people will respond to the harsh argument that the risks of having an accident, in which they or other people could be seriously injured or even killed, are now too great for them to continue driving.
- A cognitive and perceptual assessment may give insight into someone’s driving abilities. However these tests are not always accurate enough to determine cessation or continuation of driving.
A combination of these tests with an on-road evaluation is useful in determining whether someone is safe to drive. The result of this examination will be sent to the consultant or GP who will discuss the results with the driver
- Once a person has stopped driving a decision must be made as to whether taking the keys, licence and car away will help the person adjust or simply make the adjustment more difficult. Keeping the keys, licence and car often helps an individual maintain a sense of dignity.
- If all of the above fail to dissuade someone from driving it may be worth considering doing the following :
 - Hide the car keys
 - Keep the car in a different place
 - Immobilise the car
 - Sell the car perhaps having first arranged for it to break down so it needs to be taken to the garage
 - Replace the car with a new one that is a different model and colour

These actions are extreme and should be a last resort only

Warning Signs

The following is a list of warning signs to look out for:

Do not mistake these warning signs for an individual's established style of driving



Be discrete in your observations as driving errors will increase if one is feeling under scrutiny.

- INCORRECT SIGNALING
- CONFUSION BETWEEN WIPERS AND INDICATORS
- MOVING INTO INCORRECT LANES
- CONFUSED AS TO WHICH LANE TO USE ON FAMILIAR ROUTES
- PARKING INAPPROPRIATELY
- BUMPING KERBS
- SCRAPES OR DENTS ON CAR, EXTERIOR MIRRORS DAMAGED
- NEAR MISSES
- GETTING LOST IN FAMILIAR PLACES
- CONFUSION BETWEEN ACCELERATOR AND BRAKE
- DRIVING AT INAPPROPRIATE SPEEDS (Either too fast or too slow for traffic or road situations)
- DELAYED REACTION TO TRAFFIC/ROAD CONDITIONS
- CONFUSION AT ROUNDABOUTS (eg. stopping and giving right of way to vehicles on left or delayed moving off despite no vehicles approaching)
- CONFUSION AT JUNCTIONS (eg. delayed moving off despite no vehicles approaching or giving right of way to vehicles on minor road)
- INCORRECT USE OF CLUTCH (eg. gears grating or engine cuts out moving off)
- INCORRECT USE OF GEARS
- ALTERED BEHAVIOUR (eg. impulsive and not prepared to wait at junctions, roundabouts or red traffic lights. Aggressive towards other road users)
- DECREASED ATTENTION:
(unable to activate secondary controls, windows, check mirrors without causing steering to lose course. Unable to attend to driving task because of off road distractions, mobile phone, radio etc.)
- CHANGES IN SPATIAL AWARENESS (unable to judge distances between parked and oncoming vehicles, turning left too wide, turning right on incorrect side of road, travelling on incorrect side of road on bends and corners)
- STOPPING IN TRAFFIC FOR NO REASON
- INCORRECT USE OF HANDBRAKE / PARK BRAKE
(Failing to secure handbrake when parked, applying handbrake unnecessarily while on the move, rolling back on hills and forgetting to use handbrake).

