

Driving and Dementia: Are You Worried About Your Loved One Getting Behind The Wheel?

Some individuals in the early stages of dementia are able to successfully operate a vehicle. However, as Alzheimer's disease and dementia progress, individuals are at increased risk for accidents.

It is important for families to begin discussing safety while driving with dementia early.

How Do Alzheimer's And Dementia Impact Driving?

The ability to safely operate a vehicle and adhere to traffic laws takes hundreds of micro-steps and decisions which may be adversely impacted by dementia. Alzheimer's disease and dementia can:

- Impact a person's sensory perceptions, such as depth or peripheral vision.
- Impair a person's judgment (e.g., the ability to decide if there is enough time to turn left before oncoming vehicles arrive).
- Cause general confusion, including discerning the difference between red and green lights, gas and brake pedals, and which side of the street to drive on.
- Lead to disorientation, leading individuals to get lost more often, even in the most familiar places.

Tips To Start The Conversation About Driving With Alzheimer's Disease And Dementia:

- Be sensitive: Acknowledge how challenging it may be for your loved one and be sensitive that this loss of independence is difficult.
- Plan it out: Set aside time to share your concerns and to listen to your loved one's concerns.



Tips To Start The Conversation About Driving With Alzheimer's Disease And Dementia: (Cont'd)

- Discuss the risks of driving: Driving is already a risky activity. Discuss how the changes your loved one is experiencing may affect their ability to drive safely, through no fault of their own.
- Do your research: Familiarize yourself with state regulations on safe driving and license removal.
- Focus on prevention: Don't wait until it's too late before you make a plan.
- Get the care team involved: Request "back-up" by asking your loved one's physician for a "prescription" or note indicating that the individual should no longer drive. This way, the person may be less likely to direct feelings of anger toward you.



Warning Signs That Your Loved One With Alzheimer's Or Dementia May Need to Stop Driving:

- Increased disorientation, including getting lost, even in an area they have been driving for years
- Increase in misjudging speed or distance
- Getting into accidents (look for: dents or scratches on the car) or feeling at greater risk of having one
- Passengers are concerned about the individual's driving

Did You Know?

Many cities offer a driving assessment program that is either administered by, or run in cooperation with, police departments and motor vehicles departments. Inquire about such programs by calling your local Area Agency on Aging, police department, and motor vehicles bureau.



We Can Help!

Alzheimer's Orange County

Call 844.373.4400

For more caregiver tips

**Visit us at:
www.alzoc.org/resources**

Information taken from the Alzheimer's Foundation Of America

www.alzfdn.org | Reviewed by AlzOC Aug 2022