

Living Well with Dementia Caregiver Tips on Driving



Why is it unsafe for someone with dementia to drive?

- Difficulty processing information.
- Becomes lost or may feel disoriented in familiar places.
- Less alert to things happening around them.
- Difficulty with problem solving and decision-making.
- Difficulty in completing multiple tasks at once.
- Become less coordinated.
- Difficulty judging distance and space.
- May drive too slowly.
- Signals incorrectly or does not signal.
- Stops in the middle of traffic for no reason.
- May have increase in accidents (look for new “dings” on the vehicle).
- Drifts into other lanes or drives on the wrong side of the road.
- Becomes irritated or anxious while driving.
- May have difficulty seeing pedestrians.
- Has difficulty with turns and lane changes.

It is important to remember that a diagnosis of dementia does not mean a person cannot drive safely. Someone who has been diagnosed in the early stages may still be able to drive.

However, dementia is a progressive disease which impacts memory, visual-spatial disorientation, cognitive functioning and other skills it takes to drive safely.

Most individuals associate driving as a form of independence and losing that privilege can often be upsetting.

Although some individuals recognize when it is time to give up driving, others may have a difficult time assessing their own skills and may insist on still driving even when it has become unsafe.

How You Can Help

Observe Behavioral Signals

- Do they have difficulty judging distance and space?
- Do they have difficulty in completing multiple tasks?
- Do they have difficulty with processing information?
- Do they have difficulty with decision-making?

Involve the individual living with dementia in discussions

- Encourage them to discuss their own concerns openly with you.
- In early on-set dementia, involve the individual with discussion on when it is appropriate for them to stop driving.
- Try to establish guidelines early on when and how to limit driving.
- If the individual is reluctant to discuss or stop driving, you may need to reach out to their PCP to have a discussion during their next appointment.

Help Make Arrangements for Alternative Transportation

- Family and friends can be extremely helpful with bringing them to appointments, shopping, church, etc.
- Senior and special needs transportation services may be available in your area.
- Obtain information on local resources that could deliver items such as meals on wheels.

For more information about caregiver tips or program availability through Living Well with Dementia, please contact Easterseals Homemakers & Health Services at 603.335.1770.