

About you... Driving

INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

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

Driving involves a highly complex interaction between eyes, brain and muscles, and the ability to solve complicated problems. 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?

Having a diagnosis of dementia doesn't necessarily mean that you need to stop driving immediately.

In all States and Territories, except Western Australia, drivers have an obligation to tell their licensing authority of any medical condition that might affect their ability to drive safely. Dementia is one of the medical conditions that need to be disclosed because it may affect a person's driving ability.



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

The driving authority will generally advise the driver to see a doctor who will assess whether it is safe to keep driving for a period of time. If the doctor determines that dementia is affecting the person's ability to drive, then the licensing authority in most States and Territories can place conditions on their licence. These conditions might be that they can only drive close to home, or at certain times or below 100km/h. Regular medical and driving tests might be required.

Any changes in your ability to drive may mean that you should stop. The following checklist may help you consider whether any changes are occurring.

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?
- Use the accelerator and the brake at the same time?
- Brake inappropriately along main roads?

If you have noticed any of these changes, in the interest of your own and other people's safety, you might need to consider giving up driving. If you are not sure, it is a good idea to have a driving test as an objective assessment of your driving. These tests can assess your driving ability and give you feedback on your performance. Alzheimer's Australia can provide more information about these driving tests.

Even if you have not noticed any of these changes, you might like to ask a friend or family member their opinion of your driving skills.

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Giving up driving

Eventually your illness will affect your ability to drive. Some people decide to voluntarily relinquish their licence. Doctors will sometimes recommend that a person should stop driving.

Some people find giving up driving one of the hardest things to do. 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 information may help.

Alternatives to driving

If you can 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
- Community transport may be available in your area. Check with your local council

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.

Based on:

I'm told I have dementia, Alzheimer's Disease Society, UK

Further Help

The *Living with Memory Loss* program is available in each State and Territory. It consists of information and support groups for people living with early stage dementia and their family and friends.

A group program consisting of 6-8 sessions is usually held one day a week for a two-hour session. Ongoing support groups usually meet monthly for some time after the program.

In each case there are two small groups – one for people living with memory loss and the other for family members or friends. People with memory loss may attend alone if desired. The groups may meet separately for part or all of the time and come together for a cuppa.

There are many benefits from taking part in a *Living with Memory Loss* program. Most people enjoy the chance to obtain information, have questions answered, talk confidentially with others in a similar situation, discuss experiences and express feelings in a safe environment.

“It’s good to know there are others in the same boat.”

“Sharing experiences halves my worries and concerns.”

“At this group you’re not a dot on the landscape. You can talk to other people who understand you.”

The program has a positive focus on maintaining and enhancing skill and abilities and exploring ways of managing now and in the future.

For more information about the *Living with Memory Loss* program call the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.

Resources

More and more people with dementia are sharing their experiences of being diagnosed with dementia and of living with memory loss. Alzheimer’s Australia in your State or Territory will be able to help you find books or videos of these, as well as resources about dementia and how to manage with the condition.

Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500** for more information.

The Alzheimer’s Australia web site also lists useful references and information, Help Sheets, Update Sheets and some information in community languages.

Alzheimer’s Australia also has a web site, which contains up-to-date information about dementia. Visit the web site at **www.alzheimers.org.au**

For more information about the *Living with Memory Loss* program on the web site go to the *I have dementia* section.