



A diagnosis of dementia does not always mean that a person is incapable of driving. What matters is whether or not the person is driving safely. You may be wondering what to do if you notice changes in driving habits. Below are frequently asked questions to help guide you:

How does dementia impact driving?

Dementia affects more than just a person's memory. It can affect any part of the brain needed to drive safely. A person might experience changes with:

- **Vision:** Low peripheral vision, light sensitivity, trouble judging distance and space, confusing lines, boundaries, or shadows.
- **Hearing:** Not hearing approaching cars, horns, or sirens.
- **Coordination:** Slowed reaction time when stopping, turning, or speeding up.
- **Decision-making:** Challenges with problem-solving or thinking ahead on the road.
- **Orientation:** Getting lost in familiar places.
- **Processing information:** Challenges doing multiple things at once or adjusting to changes on the road.
- **Irritability:** Increased confusion and frustration while driving.
- **Alertness:** Becoming drowsy or sleepy while driving.

What are some strategies to enhance road safety?

- Drive only short distances on familiar roads
- Avoid heavy traffic or large roads when possible
- Avoid night driving or driving in bad weather
- Use home delivery services for groceries or prescriptions
- Have friends and family visit instead of going out
- When going out, arrange for friends or family to pick them up
- Arrange alternative transportation (bus, taxi, senior transportation services)

When might it be time to stop driving?

- Do others feel uncomfortable driving with the person?
- Are other drivers forced to drive defensively around the person?
- Is a co-pilot needed to help navigate or to alert the person of hazards?
- Is there loss of ability in other areas, like banking or cooking?
- Are there unexplained dents, scratches, or damage to the vehicle?

What do I do if I notice changes?

Involve the person in discussions about driving and book an appointment with the doctor. The doctor might refer the person to a specialized memory clinic. There, a complete assessment can be done to determine driving fitness. A road test may be needed. It is the doctor's responsibility to notify the motor vehicle authorities if the person's license is removed or suspended.

How will the person react if their license is revoked?

Giving up driving is not always an easy decision. The person with dementia may have mixed emotions. Some feel relief because they have noticed symptoms and agree with the doctor's decision. Others may grieve and feel confused. They may feel loss, sadness, or anger.

How do I support them through this loss?

- **Acknowledge it.** It is okay to grieve loss. Allow the person to feel the emotions that come up. Allow yourself to grieve too.
- **Take their side.** You are in this together. If the person is angry, you can be angry too.
- **Shift the blame.** Don't blame the person with dementia. Backing the doctor's decision might be hurtful. Let the person blame the doctor, the government, or the car, instead of you or themselves.

What if the person refuses to stop driving?

Sometimes, a person with dementia is unaware of their symptoms and reminding them does not help. As a last resort, you can try:

- Removing the car from the driveway
- Hiding the car keys
- Disabling the car

Instead of pointing to their driving ability, it is okay to create scenarios or stories about why the car is gone or broken. This can help protect their dignity. Make sure everyone in the person's support network tells the same story.

To seek guidance for your unique caregiving situation, contact your Dementia Care Coach. If you don't have a Dementia care Coach, call us at:

- **Ottawa:** 613-523-4004 | **Renfrew County:** 1-888-411-2067

Further Reading:

- Family Caregiver Alliance: <https://www.caregiver.org/dementia-driving>
- Alzheimer's Association: <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/safety/dementia-driving>

Ottawa: 613-523-4004 | **Renfrew-County:** 1-888-411-2067 | info@dsorc.org | DementiaHelp.ca

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