Driving

If you drive, you may need to make some changes after getting a diagnosis of dementia. You may still be able to drive safely for some time. However, there are certain people you need to tell about your dementia. There will also come a time when you have to stop driving. This will be for your own safety and for the safety of passengers and other road users.

If you are still working and drive as part of your job, you should talk to your employer. It may be possible to change to a role that you don’t have to drive for.

This booklet explains the legal issues around dementia and driving, and ways of coping if you can no longer drive.

For more detailed information on the subject see Alzheimer’s Society factsheet 439, Driving and dementia.
Living with dementia: Driving

What the law says

You must tell the appropriate organisation about your diagnosis promptly. If you live in England or Wales, contact the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you live in Northern Ireland, you need to contact the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

It is a criminal offence if you don’t inform them and you can be fined up to £1,000. The steps below show what you need to do and what usually happens next.

- Write to the DVLA or DVA, or phone them if you would prefer. You can find their details in ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 16.

- If you want to carry on driving, tell the DVLA or DVA when you get in touch. They will send you a questionnaire to fill in.

- You must also tell your insurance company that you have dementia. If you don’t tell them, your insurance may not be valid and will not cover you if you have an accident. It is illegal to drive without valid insurance cover.

- The DVLA or DVA will usually contact your GP or specialist about your dementia and may ask you to take a driving assessment (see ‘Assessment centres’) on page 5. The information the GP or specialist gives and the results of your assessment will help the DVLA or DVA decide if you can carry on driving.

- The DVLA or DVA may decide that you are not safe to drive. You have a right to appeal against this within six months if you live in England or Wales, or within three months in Northern Ireland.

For more information visit alzheimers.org.uk
If the DVLA or DVA allows you to continue driving, they will issue a licence usually for one year and require that your condition is reviewed every year. If you are in the very early stages of dementia, they may issue a licence for up to three years. You won’t have to pay a fee each time you renew your licence and the DVLA will send you a reminder form automatically.

If your doctor advises you to stop driving at any time you must do so immediately. If you continue to drive, they are allowed to notify the DVLA or DVA.

If someone close to you tells the DVLA or DVA that they are concerned about your driving, you may receive a questionnaire about your condition. This will ask for your consent for them to make enquiries of your GP or specialist. This is so that they can make a decision about whether you can continue to drive.

‘My mum’s just received her letter from the DVLA revoking her licence due to her health... I agree with the DVLA as I’d hate to see my mum get hurt behind the wheel, or hurting anyone else while she’s driving.’

Daughter of a person living with dementia
Assessment centres

The DVLA or DVA may ask you to take a driving assessment at an approved assessment centre.

An assessment is not like a driving test. It is an overall assessment of the impact your dementia has on your driving performance and safety. It also makes some allowances for the bad habits many of us may have developed.

If the DVLA (or DVA) requires you to take an assessment to help decide whether you can still drive, they will pay for it.

You can ask to take a driving assessment voluntarily and this may be helpful when you are considering whether to renew your driving licence.

You should apply directly to an assessment centre and will need to pay a fee. See ‘Other useful organisations’ for a list of the centres at the end of this booklet.

‘It’s not all doom and gloom after your diagnosis of dementia and informing the DVLA... for the past 9 years my driving licence was granted on a 12-month basis.’

A person living with dementia
Tips for driving safely

If you do carry on driving, there are ways to make driving easier and safer.

- Keep to familiar routes.
- Avoid busy areas or driving during the busiest times of the day.
- Don’t drive at night.
- Don’t drive in bad weather.
- Keep to short trips.
- Leave plenty of time for your journey.
- Have a passenger with you to help.
- Don’t drive when you are stressed or upset.
When should I stop driving?

Many people with dementia decide to give up driving, often because their condition has progressed to a stage where they no longer feel safe on the road.

For example, they may find that they struggle to make decisions in time while driving, or they can no longer judge distances or speeds accurately. Many older people also find that their eyesight or mobility are not as good as they used to be.

Sometimes it is clear that you should stop driving. This may be because you:

- feel less confident or get more irritated when you drive
- get lost or confused on a familiar route
- hit the kerb or start to have minor bumps and scrapes.

If you are still unsure whether you are driving safely:

- ask the people close to you if they are worried about your driving and listen to their views
- talk to your GP or specialist and ask their opinion
- ask to be referred to a driving assessment centre for an expert opinion.
If your partner relies on you driving, you may feel extra pressure to continue. But it’s better to travel safely on a bus than to have an accident in the car.

If you decide to give up driving, write to the DVLA or DVA telling them your decision, and enclose your driving licence.

‘At first we were disappointed about not driving... but it doesn’t really affect us too much, in fact we go out more now than we used to before.’

A person living with dementia and his wife
Living without a car

It can be difficult to get used to not driving. If you rely on your car for trips to the supermarket or to see other people for example, it can be daunting to think of life without it.

Try to think positively. There are lots of other ways of getting around. Finding out about these can help you to stay in control. There are even some specific services that might help you in getting around. For more on these see ‘The alternatives’ on page 13.

There are also lots of benefits to not driving. For example, you might save money and not have to worry about keeping your car. For more see ‘Benefits of not driving’ on page 14.

You might find it helpful to talk to others in the same situation by joining a support group. Tell your family how you feel so that they can understand. You may feel angry or frustrated but you may also feel relieved.

‘I was 55 when I got my diagnosis and had to stop driving, so my GP got me a bus pass which has really helped.’

A person living with dementia
Benefits of not driving

Although it may feel inconvenient at first, you may find there are advantages to not driving.

These include:

- you save money by not having to maintain a car and the costs of insurance, tax and fuel
- you don’t need to remember to take the car for an MOT or service
- you don’t have to worry about the car breaking down
- you won’t feel anxious about driving somewhere new
- you don’t have to worry about finding somewhere to park
- you can sit back and enjoy being a passenger
- you might enjoy walking a little more – it is a good way to take exercise.
The alternatives

When you are not driving, you might want to consider the following ways of getting around.

- Take a taxi to the supermarket once a month to stock up on groceries and essentials. You won’t be paying to keep a car so you can use some of the money you save on this. Book the taxi in advance and set up an account with a taxi firm you trust and like.

- Ask whether a friend or a family member can take you to the shops with them on a regular trip.

- For trips into town, ask your local authority if there is a dial-a-ride bus in your area. You need to phone in advance to book this, so remember to keep a note of when you are going.

- Ask your hospital whether there is a driver service that can take you to your appointments.

- Some areas offer older people free bus travel. Your local authority will tell you what is available in your area.

- Ask at your local train station about discounts for cheaper train travel or using a Railcard.

For advice and support call the National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
You may also be able to do more from home without the need to travel. For example:

- If you have a computer, use the internet to order your shopping and have it delivered to your home. You can keep a shopping list saved on your computer so you don’t forget regular items. If you don’t feel confident ordering online, ask a friend or a family member if they can help you.

- Pay your bills by direct debit so you don’t have to travel to the bank or post office too often. You could also think about setting up telephone banking.

- Have a hairdresser come to your home, rather going to them.

‘A good thing that has come out of giving up driving is that I have been getting more exercise through walking.’

A person living with dementia
Other useful organisations

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

Drivers’ Medical Enquiries
DVLA
Swansea SA99 1TU
0300 790 6806 (Monday to Friday 8am–5.30pm, Saturday 8am–1pm)
www.gov.uk/report-driving-medical-conditions

The section of DVLA that decides which drivers with medical conditions are safe to drive in Great Britain.

Driver and Vehicle Agency (Northern Ireland)

Drivers Medical Section
DVA
Castlerock Road
Waterside
Coleraine BT51 3TB
0300 200 7861 (Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm)
dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

The section of DVA that decides which drivers with medical conditions are safe to drive in Northern Ireland.
Driving Mobility
www.drivingmobility.org.uk

Offers independent information and advice for people who have problems with driving or mobility.

Northern Ireland Mobility Centre
028 9029 7880
hq@disabilityaction.org
www.disabilityaction.org

Offers independent information and advice for people who have problems with driving or mobility in Northern Ireland.
Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service
www.wmdas.co.uk

North Wales centre
01745 584858

South Wales centre
029 2055 5130

Charity that offers support for people who have problems with driving or mobility.
Living with dementia: Driving

For advice and support call the National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
This publication has been reviewed by people affected by dementia and health and social care professionals. A full list of sources is available on request.

To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of sources, contact publications@alzheimers.org.uk

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Alzheimer’s Society is the UK’s leading dementia charity. We provide information and support, improve care, fund research, and create lasting change for people affected by dementia.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer’s disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call the Alzheimer’s Society National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)