It is possible to keep driving after a diagnosis of dementia. However, there are things a person with dementia must do to keep driving safely and legally. This includes telling their driver licensing agency (DVLA/DVA) about their diagnosis and following the advice of healthcare professionals.

As a person’s dementia gets worse, a time will come when they must stop driving. This may be very difficult to accept.

This factsheet explains what the law says about driving with dementia. It also gives tips on stopping driving and how to support a person with dementia who can no longer drive.

This factsheet is about driving cars and motorcycles, which carry ‘group 1’ driving licences. It does not cover ‘group 2’ licences, which are for large lorries and buses. A person diagnosed with dementia cannot have a ‘group 2’ licence.

A person with dementia may also find it useful to read booklet 1504, Driving from our Living with dementia series.
Contents

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Driving and dementia

How dementia affects driving

A diagnosis of dementia is not in itself a reason to stop driving. One in three people with dementia still drives. The most important thing is whether the person can still drive safely.

Driving may feel easy and natural for people who drive often or have been driving for many years. However, it is a complex task that involves quick thinking as well as sensory (vision, hearing) and manual skills. A safe driver must use a range of mental abilities including:

- focus and attention – to switch between different driving tasks while ‘reading’ the road
- visuospatial skills – to keep the right speed, distance and road position
- problem-solving skills – to deal with any challenges on the road, such diversions or obstacles
- judgement and decision-making – for example to understand and prepare for the actions of other road users
- reaction skills – to act quickly to avoid an accident
- memory – for example, to remember a route.

A safe driver also needs to be patient and calm. Being patient and calm also helps people to drive more safely.

1 in 3 people with dementia still drives
The common symptoms of dementia can affect all the skills needed for driving – this is why the driver licensing agencies must know about it. As dementia gets worse, it affects these skills even more. This means everyone with dementia will eventually be unable to drive safely.

How quickly this happens varies from person to person. However, most drivers with Alzheimer’s disease will need to stop driving in the middle stage of dementia. Some types of dementia have certain early symptoms that mean an end to driving might be sooner. For example, visual hallucinations are common in dementia with Lewy bodies and impulsive behaviour is common in frontotemporal dementia.

For more information about the stages of dementia see factsheet 458, The progression of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.

Other health conditions Many people with dementia have other health conditions that may also affect their driving. Problems with vision and hearing are common in older people, as is arthritis. If this affects a person’s neck, it may reduce their head-turning ability. This can make manoeuvres like pulling out into moving traffic much harder. Some older people also have weaker muscles which can make physical tasks like steering or braking difficult.

Certain medications, such as those taken to help a person to sleep or some drugs for depression, may also affect a person’s driving. If the person needs to inform their driver licensing agency about taking these medications, the doctor will advise them of this.
What the law says about driving and dementia

UK law on driving and dementia is clear. A driver (or ‘licence holder’) who is diagnosed with dementia must tell their licensing agency straightaway. If they don’t, they can be fined up to £1,000. In England and Wales, drivers must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). In Northern Ireland, they must tell the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA). (See ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 15 for full contact details.) The doctor, or other healthcare professional should make these rules clear to the person and anyone else, when they diagnose the person’s dementia.

Drivers with dementia must also tell their car insurance provider straightaway. If they do not, their policy may not be valid. It is illegal to drive without at least third-party cover.

If a person with dementia wants to keep driving, they must tell DVLA/DVA. The agency will ask about the person’s medical information and decide if they are safe to drive. Or DVLA/DVA may ask the person to have a driving assessment. The section ‘If the person wants to keep driving’ explains this in more detail.

In some cases, the doctor will tell the person to stop driving straightaway. This will happen if the person’s symptoms will clearly make them unsafe on the road. The doctor may be unsure of someone’s ability and will want them to stop driving until more tests are done. Medical advice like this must always be followed – even if it takes many weeks for DVLA/DVA to decide if the person can keep driving.

Some people diagnosed with dementia decide for themselves that they want to stop driving and send their licence back to DVLA/DVA. This is called ‘voluntary surrender’. For more about this see the section ‘Giving up driving’ on page 12.
Driving and mild cognitive impairment (MCI)
Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is a condition that causes minor problems with memory, perception, reasoning, judgement or attention. People diagnosed with MCI do not have dementia, but some will get it over time. For more see factsheet 470, *What is mild cognitive impairment (MCI)*?

MCI can affect a person's driving, but this happens much less often than in dementia. This means that drivers diagnosed with MCI do not always have to tell DVLA/DVA about their condition.

If a person with MCI finds their driving is affected by their MCI symptoms, they must tell DVLA/DVA about this. A person's close family, friends or healthcare professional may be good judges of their driving and can also tell DVLA/DVA if needed. As with dementia, DVLA/DVA will ask for a medical report and decide if the person is safe to drive.

A driver with a dementia diagnosis must tell their car insurance provider straightaway. If they don’t, their policy may become invalid. It is illegal to drive without at least third-party cover.

If the person does not tell DVLA/DVA
Some people who are diagnosed with dementia do not tell the driver licensing authorities and keep driving. This may be because they do not accept or recognise their diagnosis, or they aren’t aware of how much their dementia is affecting their driving.

Not telling DVLA/DVA puts the person at risk of a fine and arrest as well as a possible accident. It also puts them in danger of driving without insurance as their policy may now be invalid.

If this happens, the doctor should try to persuade the person to stop driving and encourage them to tell DVLA/DVA (or let their family do this for them). If this does not work, the doctor may have to give the person’s relevant medical information to DVLA/DVA. The doctor does not need to ask the person before they do this, but they must tell them afterwards in writing.
This can all be very difficult and stressful for the person with dementia, their family, their doctor and anyone else supporting them. For tips on how to handle these situations and to find out what support is available, see the section ‘If the person refuses to stop driving’ on page 11.

It may be helpful to try to reason with the person. However, for some people, their dementia may mean that they are not able to accept their diagnosis or understand how it affects their driving.

If the person wants to keep driving

The first step for someone who is diagnosed with dementia and wants to keep driving is to tell DVLA/DVA about their diagnosis straightaway.

The person should give their:

- full name
- address
- date of birth
- driver number on their driving licence (if known).

They can get in touch with their licensing agency by post, on the phone or online (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 15 for full contact details).

DVLA/DVA will then send the person a questionnaire and a request to get medical reports from their doctor. If you live in England or Wales, this questionnaire can also be downloaded from the GOV.UK website (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 15). Once the person has returned it, DVLA/DVA will speak to their doctor.
Based on the doctor’s report, medical advisers at DVLA/DVA will decide if the person can keep driving. There are several possible results at this stage. DVLA/DVA may:

- renew the person’s licence, usually for one year
- cancel or ‘revoke’ it straightaway (see ‘When DVLA/DVA decides that the person must stop driving’ on page 11)
- ask for more information, such as more medical details
- ask the person to take an on-road driving assessment before making a decision (see ‘Driving assessment’). This is the least common of the possibilities.

In all cases, DVLA/DVA will tell the person in writing.

**Driving assessment**

DVLA/DVA will ask someone to take a driving assessment if they are not sure if the person can still drive safely. This will be at one of 20 approved driving assessment centres around the UK, or at one of their related ‘satellite’ centres (see Driving Mobility centres under ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 16). DVLA/DVA will refer the driver to a centre near their home and will pay for the assessment.

Some people choose to have an assessment without DVLA/DVA asking them to. A person may do this if they have a valid licence but want some extra advice or teaching. In these cases, the person must get in touch with the centre directly and pay for the assessment. Prices vary but the average cost is between £70–90.

The person being assessed should go to the centre with another person who is able to drive or accompany them home using alternative transport, if necessary. This is in case the assessment finds that the person is unsafe to drive. The person with dementia must also bring their driving licence and any glasses they need for driving.

The assessment is not like a learners’ driving test. It is carried out by a specialist occupational therapist and an advanced driving instructor. They assess how much the person’s dementia is affecting their driving and
whether they can drive safely and comfortably. The assessment is done in
a supportive way and is understanding of the bad habits that many drivers
pick up, such as not indicating or turning the steering wheel while parked
before moving off. The assessors will work with the person to help them
keep driving if this can be done safely.

The driving assessment takes about two hours and generally includes the
following steps.

1. The person with dementia answers questions about their medical and
driving history, and any driving problems they may have. After this, they
do a short written test of mental abilities.

2. Reaction time and limb strength (for steering and braking) are tested
on a special static ‘rig’. This is a car with the steering wheel and foot
pedals linked to a computer. The person’s eyesight is also checked.

   By this stage, a few people will be
   found to be unsafe to drive and the
   assessment will end here.

3. The main part of the assessment is a drive on public roads, along a set
route. This is the best test of a person’s driving ability. This part happens
in a dual-control car, which has a brake on the passenger’s side as well
as the driver’s side. Some centres have a private road that the person
drives around first. This helps them get used to the car and allows the
instructor to check that they are safe to go on the public road. The
person drives with the advanced driving instructor in the passenger
seat and the occupational therapist in the back.

4. Back at the centre, the assessors tell the driver what they have found.
If the decision is that the person can drive safely, they’ll be advised how
to do this confidently. If the assessors decide that the person is not
safe to drive, the information and advice they receive will be about other
options. In this case, someone else will need to drive the person home if
they came to the centre by car. If DVLA/DVA asked for the assessment,
the centre will send them a report. The licence holder can ask the
agency for a copy of this.
When DVLA/DVA decides that the person can keep driving

If DVLA/DVA decides that a person with dementia can keep driving, they will send them a new driving licence. It will usually be valid for one year. For people with early dementia, this may be up to three years.

The person condition’s must be reviewed every time they renew their licence. They won’t have to pay a fee for this and DVLA will send a reminder letter.

It is a good idea for those close to the person with dementia to stay aware of their driving skills. The person should also have regular check-ups with their doctor to see how their dementia is progressing. The effect of dementia on the person’s driving should be considered at these check ups or at other healthcare appointments, where appropriate.

Reducing the risks

While a person with dementia may be able to drive safely, driving may feel a bit more difficult than before. It may be easier to stay safe on the road if they:

■ don’t go for long periods without driving – to keep their skills and stay confident
■ keep to short and familiar routes at quiet times of the day – so they are less likely to get lost or stuck in heavy traffic
■ drive in daylight – with good road and weather conditions
■ drive without distractions, like the radio – for better focus
■ only drive when they feel fully awake and well.

Even if DVLA/DVA decides the person can keep driving, it may be helpful for them to plan ahead for when they must stop completely. Talking to others about this and making some changes to their usual arrangements can make it much easier to stop driving when the time comes. See ‘Tips: supporting someone who has given up driving’ on page 13 for more on this.
When DVLA/DVA decides that the person must stop driving

If DVLA/DVA decides that the person is not safe to drive, the person must return their licence to DVLA/DVA and stop driving.

Drivers who wish to appeal must send a formal petition to the Magistrates’ Court in England and Wales within six months of the refusal letter being sent. Or, to a Clerk of Petty Sessions in Northern Ireland, within three months. During this time, the person is not allowed to drive, even if they think they will win their appeal.

Being told to stop driving affects people in different ways. For some it is a relief, but many others feel it is a huge loss. A few are very angry with the decision as they may not understand how much dementia impacts their driving skills. Acknowledging the person’s feelings, listening to them and addressing their concerns may help them accept the decision. However, a number of people will be unable to accept DVA/DVLA’s decision. For more on this see ‘If the person refuses to stop driving’.

If the person refuses to stop driving

Some people keep driving even though DVLA/DVA has assessed them as unsafe to do so. This can be a very distressing situation for both the person and their family.

However, it is important to remember that the person is not being difficult on purpose. Their dementia may mean they cannot see how their symptoms affect their driving. Some people may still not accept their diagnosis, or keep forgetting that their licence has been cancelled. This means they may find it very difficult to accept DVLA/DVA’s decision or listen to reasoning from their doctor, family members, carers or professionals.

When this happens, the person’s doctor or family should write in confidence to DVLA/DVA. The agency will follow things up with the local police.
Supporting someone who is unsafe to drive but refuses to stop can be very challenging. Where possible, many carers may:

- hide the car keys
- sell or give the car away
- disable the car or lock the steering wheel
- park the car out of sight.

They can also get help by calling Alzheimer’s Society’s support line on 0333 150 3456 or by talking to people with similar experiences on our online community, Talking Point, at alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint

**Giving up driving**

Many people with dementia choose to stop driving because they begin to find it stressful or they lose confidence in their abilities. A person should consider stopping if they:

- get annoyed easily and frequently when driving
- get lost even on routes they know well
- misjudge speeds or distances
- drift between lanes or hit kerbs
- get very confused by roadworks
- have minor accidents or near-misses
- find that passengers worry about their driving.
Giving up driving can be a very difficult decision to make. A person who feels they must do this will need support and understanding from those close to them. They may feel unhappy about stopping driving if:

- they are used to being independent
- they have always driven their partner or family around
- they are used to visiting friends or family or going on day trips by car
- it means everyday tasks will get more difficult, such as shopping, going to places of worship or seeing the doctor.

However, it may be easier for a person with dementia to accept not driving if it has been their choice, rather than DVLA/DVA telling them to stop. It can also help if they have planned for the change by slowly adapting their use of the car over time.

If a person decides to give up driving, they must send a ‘Declaration of voluntary surrender’ form to DVLA (or a covering letter to DVA) along with their licence. They can download the form from GOV.UK or get one by calling DVLA (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 15).

**Tips: supporting someone who has given up driving**

Giving up driving is not always an easy decision for a person with dementia. However, with plenty of support and understanding they can get used to this change and still live well.

Anyone supporting a person who has given up driving may find it useful to:

- recognise how the person with dementia may be feeling. Driving may have been an important part of their independence. Without it, they may lose confidence and feel unhappy. Using public transport may also seem stressful or difficult, particularly if the person has physical problems. Cuts in public transport may also mean the services in their area are expensive or not very regular.
encourage the person to use new transport options, so that they can feel more in control. They could find out details and timetables of local transport services, for example. Make sure the person is getting all the travel discounts they are entitled to. Many mobility centres also offer an ‘aftercare’ service of practical local advice for people who have stopped driving.

There are many day-to-day tasks that a person can still do without driving. Other than using public transport, a person can:

- book a taxi to go to and from the supermarket once a month or when they have larger amounts of shopping. They could set up an account with a taxi firm they trust and like, and order taxis in advance
- get a shoppers’ bus to the supermarket and back
- find out about local organisations that offer community transport services to help people who are older or have difficulty accessing public transport to get out and about (such as Dial-a-ride)
- ask if the hospital can help with transport for appointments
- pay bills by direct debit so they don’t need to visit the bank or post office so often – if they’ve made someone an attorney, under a property and financial affairs LPA, this person may be able to do these things for them, or with them
- order shopping online (if possible) for home delivery, or be helped to do so.

It may also help to point out some of the benefits of not driving. These include:

- no longer having to find parking spaces or remember routes
- less money spent on petrol, servicing, road tax and car insurance every month
- no more stress of having to drive in busy traffic
- the chance to meet people and chat when travelling on public transport
- getting more exercise if they decide to walk instead.
Other useful organisations

Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA)
Driver Licensing Enquiries
County Hall
Castlerock Road
Waterside
Coleraine BT51 3TB

0300 200 7861 (9am–5pm Monday–Friday)
dva@doeni.gov.uk
www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/motoring.htm

The DVA manages the licensing and testing of vehicles and drivers in Northern Ireland.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
Drivers’ medical enquiries
DVLA
Swansea SA99 1TU

0300 790 6806 (8am–5.30pm Monday–Friday, 8am–1pm Saturday)
www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla

The DVLA is the government agency that looks after the database of drivers in Great Britain, and a database of vehicles in the UK. Search ‘Form CG1’ on their website to find the medical questionnaire.
Driving Mobility centres
A network of driving assessment centres across the UK.

Enter your postcode to find a centre near you at www.drivingmobility.org.uk/find-a-centre

Belfast (including satellite centres at Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Newry and Omagh)

The Northern Ireland Mobility Centre (NIMC)
Disability Action
Portside Business Park
189 Airport Road
Belfast BT3 9ED
028 9029 7877
mobilitycentre@disabilityaction.org
www.disabilityaction.org


Regional Driving Assessment Centre
Patricks Farm
Meriden Road
Hampton in Arden B92 0LT
0300 300 2240
info@rdac.co.uk
www.rdac.co.uk/services
Bodelwyddan (including a satellite centre at Newtown, Powys)
North Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service
Disability Resource Centre
Glan Clwyd Hospital
Bodelwyddan
Denbighshire LL18 5UJ
01745 584858
mobilityinfo@btconnect.com
www.wmdas.co.uk

Bristol (including satellite centres at Weymouth and Yeovil)
Driving and Mobility Centre (West of England) CIC
The Vassall Centre
Gill Avenue
Fishponds
Bristol BS16 2QQ
(or BS16 2NB if using sat nav)
0117 965 9353
mobserv@drivingandmobility.org
www.drivingandmobility.org

Cardiff (including a satellite centre at Pembroke Dock)
South Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service
Rookwood Hospital
Fairwater Road
Llandaff
Cardiff CF5 2YN
029 2055 5130
info@wddac.co.uk
www.wmdas.co.uk
Carshalton (including satellite centres at Leatherhead and Worthing)
QEF Mobility Services
1 Metcalfe Avenue
Carshalton
Surrey SM5 4AW
(or SM5 4NR if using sat nav)
020 8770 1151
mobility@qef.org.uk
www.qef.org.uk

Chester
Chester DriveAbility
Off Mannings Lane (North)
Chester CH2 1PR
(or CH2 4EU if using sat nav)
All post should be sent c/o Bodelwyddan
01745 584858
mobilityinfo@btconnect.com
www.wmdas.co.uk

Derby (including satellite centres at Newark and Stoke-on-Trent)
Derby DrivAbility
Kingsway
Derby DE22 3LZ
01332 371929
dhft.driving@nhs.net
www.uhdb.nhs.uk/service-drivability

Hull
c/o Regional Driving Assessment Centre, Birmingham
Leeds (including a satellite centre at York)

William Merritt Disabled Living Centre
Aire House
100 Town Road
Rodley
Leeds LS13 1HP
0113 350 8989
info@wmdlc.org
www.wmdlc.org

Maidstone (including satellite centres at Canterbury, Greenhithe-Swanscombe, Uckfield and Westham)

South East DriveAbility
The First Floor
Aylesford Logistics Centre
Bellingham Way
Aylesford
Kent ME20 6XS
0300 0134 886
kcht.sedriveability@nhs.net
www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/southeast-driveability/

Manchester

c/o Regional Driving Assessment Centre, Birmingham

Newcastle upon Tyne (including a satellite centre at Penrith, Cumbria)

North East Drive Mobility
Walkergate Park Centre for Neuro-rehabilitation and Neuro-psychiatry
Benfield Road
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 4QD
0191 287 5090
northeast.drivemobility@ntw.nhs.uk
www.cntw.nhs.uk/services/north-east-drivemobility-independent-assessment-advice-servicewalkergate-park
Driving and dementia

Oxford
c/o Regional Driving Assessment Centre, Birmingham

Sheffield
William Merritt Centre Sheffield
SOAR Works Enterprise Centre
14 Knutton Road
Parsons Cross
Sheffield S5 9NU
0114 303 9030
info@wmdlc.org
http://www.wmdlc.org

Southampton (including satellite centres at Basingstoke, Ferndown, Newport (Isle of Wight) and Salisbury)
Wessex DriveAbility
Leornain House
Kent Road
Portswood
Southampton SO17 2LJ
023 8055 4100
enquiries@wessexdriveability.org.uk
www.wessexdriveability.org.uk
St Helens (including satellite centres at Leyland, North Liverpool)
The North West Driving Assessment Service (formerly Wrightington Mobility Centre)
Fleet House
Pye Close
Haydock
St Helens
Lancs WA11 9SJ
01942 483713
mobilitycentre@bridgewater.nhs.uk
www.bridgewater.nhs.uk/northwestwide/
northwestdrivingassessmentservice/

Thetford (including satellite centres at Campsea Ashe, Chelmsford, Colchester, King’s Lynn – South Wootton, Lowestoft, MS Therapy Centre Norwich, Peterborough and Spalding)
East Anglian DriveAbility
2 Napier Place
Thetford
Norfolk IP24 3RL
01842 753029
mail@eastangliandriveability.org.uk
www.eastangliandriveability.org.uk

Truro (including satellite centres at Exeter, Launceston, Liskeard, Penzance and Plymouth)
Cornwall Mobility
North Buildings
Royal Cornwall Hospital
Truro
Cornwall TR1 3LJ
01872 254920
info@cornwallmobility.co.uk
www.cornwallmobility.co.uk/how-we-help/our-assessment-services/
Welwyn Garden City (including satellite centres at Dunstable, Harlow and South Oxhey)

Hertfordshire Action on Disability Mobility Centre
The Woodside Centre
The Commons
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire AL7 4DD

01707 384263
driving@hadnet.org.uk
www.hadnet.org.uk/driving centre
People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need.
To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on 0330 333 0804 or go to alzheimers.org.uk/donate