



# Driving

Living with  
dementia series





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# 1



## Driving

When you are told you have dementia, there's a lot to take in and changes to make. If you drive, you may still be able to drive safely for some time. However, you have to contact certain organisations and tell them about your dementia. There will also come a time when you must stop driving. This will be for your own safety and for the safety of passengers and other road users.

If you drive as part of your job, you should talk to your employer. You may be able to change to a role that you don't have to drive for.

This booklet explains the law around dementia and driving, and includes suggestions for living well without a car.



For more detailed information on the subject see Alzheimer's Society factsheet **439, Driving and dementia.**

This booklet 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. You cannot have a 'group 2' licence if you have dementia.







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# What the law says

You must tell the driver licensing agency responsible for your country about your diagnosis straightaway. If you live in England or Wales, this is the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you live in Northern Ireland, this is the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA).

- You can contact DVLA/DVA by post, phone or online. Or you can ask a trusted friend or family member to do this for you. You'll find these details in 'Other useful organisations' on page 17.
- It is illegal to not tell DVLA/DVA about your diagnosis and you can be fined up to £1,000.

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

If you want to keep driving, you must let DVLA/DVA know. With your consent, they may ask your doctor for a medical report to decide if you are safe to drive. For more on this see **section 3** 'What if I want to keep driving?' on page 6.



If you want to give up driving, you must send your licence back to DVLA/DVA. For more on this see **section 4 ‘When should I stop driving?’ on page 10.**

If your doctor asks you to stop driving at any time you must do so straightaway. If you keep driving, they may have to tell DVLA/DVA. People close to you can also do this if they are worried about your driving.





# What if I want to keep driving?

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If you want to keep driving, you must tell DVLA/DVA when you tell them about your diagnosis.

The steps below show what usually happens next.

- DVLA/DVA will send you a questionnaire and will ask if they can contact your doctor about your dementia.
- DVLA/DVA will use your medical information to decide if you are safe to drive. If they are unsure, they may ask you to take a driving assessment (see **'Assessment centres'** on page 8).

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**'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



- If DVLA/DVA decides that you are not safe to drive, you can appeal. You must do this within six months if you live in England or Wales, or within three months in Northern Ireland.
- If DVLA/DVA allows you to keep driving, they will send you a new licence. It will usually be valid for one year. However, this may be up to three years if you are in the early stages of dementia. Your condition will be reviewed every time you renew your licence. You won't have to pay a fee for this and DVLA will send you a reminder.

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## Assessment centres

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DVLA/DVA may ask you to take a driving assessment at an approved assessment centre and if they do, they will pay for it. An assessment is not like a learner's driving test. The driving assessor will be looking to see if you still have the skills needed to drive safely.

They will look at the impact dementia has on your driving ability such as difficulties with:

- attention
- orientation
- problem-solving
- judgement and decision-making
- reactions
- short-term memory.

You may choose to take a driving assessment without DVLA/DVA asking you to. This may be helpful if you are unsure about renewing your driving licence. If so, you must contact an assessment centre yourself and will need to pay a fee. See '**Other useful organisations**' at the end of this booklet for a list of the centres.



# Tips for driving safely

If DVLA/DVA decides that you can keep driving, here are some suggestions to make driving easier and safer.

- ✓ Keep to familiar routes.
- ✓ Drive in less busy areas or at quiet times of the day.
- ✓ Drive in daylight and good weather.
- ✓ Only drive when you feel awake and alert.
- ✓ Keep to short trips.
- ✓ Leave plenty of time for your journey.
- ✗ Don't drive when you are stressed or upset.
- ✓ Tell a friend or family member where you are going.



# When should I stop driving?

Some people with dementia decide to give up driving. This is often because their condition starts to make them feel unsafe on the road.

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For example, they may find it harder to make quick decisions while driving, or they can no longer judge distances or speeds. Many older people also find that their eyesight or physical problems make driving more challenging. For example, weak muscles in the hands can reduce steering ability.

Sometimes it is clear that you should stop driving. For example, if you:

- feel less confident or get more irritated when you drive
- get lost or confused easily, even on familiar routes
- hit the kerb or start to have small bumps and scrapes.

If you are unsure about your ability to drive safely:

- Ask the people close to you if they are worried about your driving and listen to their views.
- Talk to your doctor and see what they think.
- Ask to be referred to a driving assessment centre for an expert opinion.





Giving up driving is not an easy choice to make. Driving may be something that helps you feel in control of your day-to-day life. If family members rely on you to drive them around, you may also feel like you have to keep driving. But it's better to travel safely by bus, train or taxi than to have an accident in the car. Your family will understand and help you to cope. They may even be relieved.

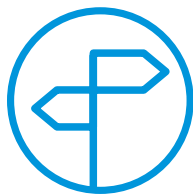
If you decide to give up driving, send your licence and a 'Declaration of voluntary surrender' form to DVLA (or covering letter to DVA). You can download the form from the GOV.UK website or get one by calling your relevant driving licensing agency.

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**'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



## Adapting to not driving

It can be difficult to get used to not driving. Driving may feel like part of who you are and you may feel less independent without it. But, with the right support, you can adjust to this change and find benefits of not driving that help you live well.

You may feel angry or frustrated about not driving. Or you may feel relieved if driving was becoming stressful. It is important to tell your family how you feel so that they can understand and support you.

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It can also help to talk to others in the same situation. You can do this by visiting our online community, Talking Point, at [alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint](https://alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint) or by finding a support group in your area at [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory](https://alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory) or through our support line on **0333 150 3456**.

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**‘I was upset and relieved when DVLA took away my licence. I wanted the independence of having it but knew it wasn’t safe.’**

A person living with dementia

It is often easier to accept not driving if it has been your choice, rather than DVLA/DVA deciding for you. It can also help if you plan ahead for life without a car by making small changes to your routine over time.

There are many other ways of getting around and staying independent. For more on this see **'The alternatives' on page 14.**

Thinking about the benefits of not driving can also make this change easier. For example, you might save money and not have to worry about keeping your car. For more on this see **'Benefits of not driving' on page 16.**



## The alternatives

If you are an older person, see if your area offers free bus travel for older people. Your local council can tell you. You can ask your local train station about train ticket discounts or using a railcard. Other ways of getting around without a car include:

- taking a taxi to and from the supermarket once a month or when you have larger amounts of shopping. You can use some of the money you save from not having a car. Book the taxi ahead of time and set up an account with a taxi firm you trust and like
- asking a friend or a family member to take you to the shops with them on a regular trip
- asking your local council if there is a dial-a-ride bus to take you into town. You need to book this in advance, so remember to note down when it will arrive
- asking your hospital if there is a service that can take you to your appointments.

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**‘[My wife told me she] enjoys using her bus pass anyway, as she gets to chat to people at the stop and on the bus.’**

Husband of a person with dementia



There are also many tasks that you can do from home without travelling. For example, you can:

- order your shopping online and have it sent to your home. You can make an online shopping list and save it so you don't forget regular items. If you don't feel confident using the internet, ask if a friend or a family member can help
- pay your bills by direct debit so you don't have to go to the bank or post office too often. You can also set up telephone banking. If you've made someone else an attorney, under a property and financial affairs LPA, they may be able to do these things for you, or with you
- have a hairdresser come to your home, rather than going to them.



## Benefits of not driving

While it can be challenging at first, you may find there are many good things about not driving, for example:

- you save money by not having to look after a car and pay for insurance, tax and fuel
- 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 parking
- you can enjoy being a passenger and relax in the car
- you might enjoy walking more – it is a good way to exercise.

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**‘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 (8am–7pm Monday to Friday,

8am–2pm Saturday)

[www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla/y/driving-and-medical-issues](http://www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla/y/driving-and-medical-issues)

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 (9am–5pm Monday to Friday)

[dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto:dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-tell-dva-about-medical-condition](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-tell-dva-about-medical-condition)

The section of DVA that decides which drivers with medical conditions are safe to drive in Northern Ireland.

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For more help and advice call our Dementia  
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

### **Driving Mobility**

0800 559 3636

[info@drivingmobility.org.uk](mailto:info@drivingmobility.org.uk)

[www.drivingmobility.org.uk](http://www.drivingmobility.org.uk)

Driving Mobility offers independent information and advice for people who have problems with driving or mobility.

### **Northern Ireland Mobility Centre**

028 9029 7880

[hq@disabilityaction.org](mailto:hq@disabilityaction.org)

[www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)

Disability Action are a Northern Ireland charity who work with people with disabilities. The Northern Ireland Mobility Centre is part of Disability Action. It offers independent information and advice for people who have problems with driving or mobility in Northern Ireland.

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### **Older Drivers**

0121 248 2063

[info@olderdrivers.org.uk](mailto:info@olderdrivers.org.uk)

[www.olderdrivers.org.uk](http://www.olderdrivers.org.uk)

Older Drivers offers information and advice for older people on driving safely and coping with changes to their driving ability. The website is produced by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.





## **Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service**

[www.wmdas.co.uk](http://www.wmdas.co.uk)

North Wales centre

01745 584858

[mobilityinfo@btconnect.com](mailto:mobilityinfo@btconnect.com)

South Wales centre

029 2055 5130

[info@wddac.co.uk](mailto:info@wddac.co.uk)

Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service is a charity that can offer support for people who have problems with driving or mobility.

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For more help and advice call our Dementia  
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by dementia.

Reviewed by: Dr Paul Donaghy, Consultant in Old Age Psychiatry, Gateshead Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and Intermediate Clinical Fellow, Newcastle University

To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of sources, contact [\*\*publications@alzheimers.org.uk\*\*](mailto:publications@alzheimers.org.uk)

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**We are Alzheimer's Society. We are a vital source of support and a powerful force for change for everyone affected by dementia. We provide help and hope.**

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit **[alzheimers.org.uk](https://alzheimers.org.uk)** or call our **Dementia Connect support line** on **0333 150 3456**.  
(Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



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](https://alzheimers.org.uk/donate)**



**Alzheimer's Society**  
43–44 Crutched Friars  
London EC3N 2AE

**0330 333 0804**  
**[enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk)**  
**[alzheimers.org.uk](https://alzheimers.org.uk)**

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