



Giving up driving

Supporting a person with dementia to stop driving



Alzheimer National Helpline

1800 341 341

About this factsheet

This factsheet is for family members who are supporting a person with dementia to stop driving.

A diagnosis of dementia does not mean a person must stop driving straightaway. However, a diagnosis does mean that certain things must be done to continue to drive. A person with dementia must inform the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) about their diagnosis. The driver must also inform their car insurance company to ensure their insurance is still valid. See our factsheet *Driving and dementia* for more information.

Most drivers with dementia accept that over time dementia affects their ability to drive safely. With guidance and support from family and healthcare professionals, they will engage with regular assessments and limit their driving when required. Most people will also engage in planning to stop driving and decide themselves they no longer want to drive.

What are the warning signs of unsafe driving?

Many people choose to stop driving as they begin to find it stressful and they do not feel confident when driving. As a family member or friend you may notice that driving is becoming an unsafe activity.

Warning signs of unsafe driving include:

- ▶ Getting lost in familiar places,
- ▶ Misjudging speed and distance,
- ▶ Confusing the brake and fuel pedals,
- ▶ Failing to observe traffic signals,
- ▶ Making slow or poor decisions,
- ▶ Hitting the pavement or straying across lanes while driving,
- ▶ Difficulty dealing with road works, and
- ▶ Becoming angry or confused while driving.

If you're not sure whether it is safe for your loved one to drive, ask yourself whether you feel safe in a car driven by them. Talk to them about how they feel about driving, are they afraid of having an accident, do they find it very tiring or stressful?

How to support a person with dementia to stop driving

The decision to stop driving can have a big impact on both the person with dementia and their family. It does indicate that their dementia has progressed and for many people the loss of independence is very difficult to cope with.



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How to support a person with dementia to stop driving (continued)

Some people with dementia feel relieved to stop driving and are comfortable finding new ways to get out and about. However, even people who willingly give up driving may feel sad and low in mood in the weeks and months that follow the decision. They may be irritable and defensive. It is important that their doctor is aware of any changes in mood and behaviour following the decision.

Family members and friends can help and support, things you can do include:

- Allow the person to talk about it if they want to, acknowledge it is difficult.
- Be positive, focus on the benefits that come with not having a car
 - no need to navigate traffic and find parking,
 - no longer paying for car insurance, tax or fuel,
 - no more organising or paying for car service and repairs.
- Calculate weekly or monthly savings with the person and highlight that these savings can be used to buy alternative transport services.
- Encourage the person to see that it is still possible to get out and about and do things. Take the time to help them figure out new ways to travel. A mix of public and private transport services, family and friends can often provide realistic options. For example,

- some people set up an account with a local taxi company who get to know the person and their family and often offer an agreed rate for frequent use,
- Local bus services can be very useful and provide an opportunity to meet people,
- Sometimes friends and neighbours go to the same club or have the same hobby and are open to giving a lift.
- If the person with dementia has some extra money because they have sold their car, encourage them to treat themselves to something they always wanted.
- Highlight the Free Travel Scheme, which entitles anyone 66 years or older to free travel on public transport (bus, rail, DART and Luas) with some exceptions. Some private bus operators also accept free travel cards. The Department of Social Protection website provides a list of these companies.
- Other options for supported transport include the Rural Transport Network and charities such as Vantastic.
- If the person is under 66, a Leap Card offers discounts on the cost of public transport in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford. It also means the person does not have to have correct change to use the service. Some private operators accept Leap Cards.
- Many items, such as groceries, meals and prescriptions, can be delivered to home. Some hairdressers make house calls as well. You can help the person to arrange home deliveries or services. However it is good to have reasons to go out and about, so it may be that a grocery shop is delivered weekly and a taxi service is used to get to town to meet friends for a coffee.

What if a person will not discuss driving or stopping driving?

Some people with dementia will not engage with the steps they must take in order to continue to drive following a diagnosis. In a minority of cases, people may insist on continuing to drive even after they have been informed that it is unsafe to do so.

There can be lots of reasons for this including:

- 🕒 denial about their diagnosis,
- 🕒 fear of the loss of their independence,
- 🕒 inability to understand the implications of not taking the appropriate steps,
- 🕒 self-imposed pressure to continue to drive as people rely on them to be a driver, and
- 🕒 lack of information about alternative transport options available to them.

All decisions about driving should balance the benefits of independence and mobility with safety for the driver, their passengers and the wider public.

Steps you can take to help the person reach the right decision include:

1. Talk to the person and try to work out why they are resisting taking the steps they need to. Ask them what is important to them and why they feel they need to keep driving. Think about what they use the car for. The more you know about what is motivating their resistance, the more likely you and the person with dementia can come up with a plan.
2. Give the person the Driving and dementia factsheet, it was written with people with dementia who have been through this process and it explains the steps that person must take and why. Sometimes seeing things written down can help a person to understand they cannot ignore what they need to do.
3. Ask the family doctor or the consultant to discuss driving with the person. Outline your concerns ahead of the appointment either by phone or in writing. Sometimes a person outside the family can persuade the person. The doctor can outline the steps they need to take, the consequences of continuing to drive when it is unsafe to do so and support the person in the process.

What if the person refuses to stop driving

Some people refuse to stop driving even when it is clear it is unsafe and illegal for them to continue to do so. This can be a very difficult and upsetting situation.

It is important to know that the person is probably not being difficult on purpose. The dementia itself may mean that the person lacks insight into how much their driving is affected. For other people, they may just not remember their licence is no longer valid or they may be in denial about their diagnosis.

Be patient but firm. Safety for the person, their passengers and for the general public must be the most important factor. The consequences of unsafe driving can be devastating. If there is a real immediate danger, many carers conceal the car keys or even park the car out of sight if this is possible. Others may disable the vehicle, your mechanic can speak to you about this option.

A visit from a Community Garda could be a final resort to explain to the person that they are breaking the law if they drive the car.

If you observe, or are aware of, dangerous driving on the part of the person who has dementia and who continues to drive, you should inform the Gardaí. Dangerous driving is an offense and can cause harm to others. The Gardaí can take the necessary steps to address the dangerous driving and support for the person with dementia can then be arranged. Members of the public can report traffic-related incidents using the Garda Traffic Watch lo-call number 1890 205 805.

If you or someone you know is in this situation call our National Helpline or talk to your doctor. It is very difficult to deal with this and it is important to have some support.





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Useful Contacts

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

This service provides information about dementia and about supports and services in your local area. The Driving and dementia factsheet can be ordered free of charge.

Freephone: 1800 341 341 or

Email: helpline@alzheimer.ie

Visit: www.alzheimer.ie

The National Driver Licence Service, NDLS

To find your local centre and to book an appointment. Please note you must book your appointment online, this phone number is not a booking line.

Phone: 076 108 7880

Visit: www.ndls.ie

The Road Safety Authority

For information about the medical report required to update your driving licence:

Visit: <http://www.rsa.ie/RSA/Licensed-Drivers/Safe-driving/Medical-Issues/>

The Rural Transport Network

For information about transport services that may be available in rural areas:

Phone: 066 7147 002

Visit: ruraltransportnetwork.ie

Vantastic

An Irish Charity who provide accessible transport services in Dublin but may be able to accommodate requests outside Dublin.

Phone: 1800 342 703

Visit: www.vantastic.ie

Bus Éireann

For information about public services in town and cities, rural services and intercity services.

Phone: 1850 836 611

Visit: www.buseireann.ie

Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail)

For information about public train services throughout Ireland and the Dublin DART service

Phone: your local station, numbers available on the website or in your local directory.

Visit: www.irishrail.ie

Luas

For information about the Luas lightrail system in Dublin

Phone: 1850 300 604

Visit: www.luas.ie

The Free Travel Scheme

Information available from The Department of Social Protection:

Phone: 071 915 7100 or 1890 500 000

Visit: www.welfare.ie

Leap Cards

For information about how to get and use a Leap Card

Phone: 1850 824 824

Visit: www.leapcard.ie

Dementia Awareness Training is now available to staff working in transport services, such as bus and train drivers and taxi drivers. This will help staff to understand dementia and provide good customer service to people with dementia and their families. For more information see www.dementiaelevators.ie

Factsheet: D1 **First Published:** August 2016

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