

DRIVING



LOSS OF FREEDOM:

Dementia is progressive disease meaning that symptoms such as memory loss, visual-spatial disorientation, and decreased cognitive function will worsen. With that being said, a person's driving skills will decrease as well. Eventually they will have to give up driving. However people associate driving with self-reliance and freedom and the loss of driving tends to be upsetting.

WARNING SIGNS:

- Incorrect signaling.
- Trouble navigating turns.
- Moving into a wrong lane.
- Confusion at exits.
- Driving at inappropriate speeds.
- Increased agitation or irritation while driving.
- Getting lost in familiar places.
- Decrease in confidence while driving.
- Near misses, accidents.
- Scrapes or dents on the car, garage, or mailbox.
- Hitting curbs.
- Difficulty parking within a defined space.
- Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason.
- Bad judgment on making left hand turns.
- Ticketed moving violations or warnings.
- Car accident.
- Failure to stop at stop sign or red light.
- Not scanning for other cars in traffic.
- Riding the brake.
- Easily distracted while driving.
- Other drivers often honk horn.

WAYS TO REDUCE THE NEED TO DRIVE:

- Arrange to have prescriptions, groceries and meals delivered, reducing the need to go shopping.
- Have hairdressers make home visits.
- Schedule people to visit regularly, either as volunteer or for pay.
- Create a driving calendar with friends and family members.
- Arrange for friends and family to take the person with dementia on errands or to social events.
- Contact your local Senior Citizen Center about drop offs and pickups.

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS:

- Imagine your own life without driving. Allow your relative with dementia to express how he or she feels about not driving.

- Experiment with ways to distract the person from driving. Mention that someone else should drive because the route has changed, driving conditions are dangerous, or you want to give him or her a chance to sit back, rest and enjoy the scenery.
- Initiate conversations about driving and transportation needs early and often.
- Observe the person with dementia driving.
- Keep a written record of observed driving behavior over time.

USING ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

- Family Members
- Friends
- Private Programs
- Taxi Services
- Mass Transit
- Senior Citizen Center

WHAT IF THE PERSON REFUSES TO STOP?

- Control access to the car keys. Designate one person who will do all of the driving and give that individual exclusive access to the car keys.
- Consider selling the car. This may allow you to save enough in insurance premiums, gas and maintenance costs to pay for public transportation, including taxi rides.
- Disable the car. Remove the distributor cap, battery or starter wire. Ask a mechanic to install a “kill wire” that will prevent the car from starting unless the switch is thrown. Give the person a set of keys that looks like his or her old set, but does not work to start the car.
- Get a medical prescription saying the person with dementia can no longer drive.
- When the person is still in the early stage of Alzheimer’s, ask them to sign a driving contract that gives you his or her permission to help them stop driving when the time comes.

WHAT TO SAY:

- “If you don’t want to drive at night, we can arrange for someone to pick you up.”
- “Let’s take the bus so we don’t have to deal with the parking downtown.”
- “You could save hundreds of dollars if you sold your car.”
- “Even if you were not at fault in a collision, you could be seriously injured or die.”
- “I know you would feel terrible if someone was hurt when you were driving.”
- “I’m afraid to let the grandchildren ride with you.”
- “Let’s talk with your doctor about this.”