

# About you: Driving

**This help sheet provides important information about driving and what to consider if you are living with dementia.**

Driving is a highly complex task that involves interaction between the brain, eyes and muscles.

During the early stages of dementia, many people remain safe and competent drivers. But as dementia progresses, it can affect your memory, reactions, perception and abilities. There will come a time when you need to stop driving.

Dementia can affect driving ability in many ways, including:

- finding your way around
- remembering which way to turn
- judging the distance from other cars and objects
- judging the speed of other cars
- reaction time
- hand-eye coordination.

## Licensing and insurance requirements

**If you hold a driver's licence, the law requires you to tell your licensing authority about your diagnosis. You are also required to tell your vehicle insurer.**

In some cases, your doctor may decide they have a duty of care to tell the licensing authority on your behalf. If you want to continue driving, you will need a medical review. In some states and territories, this involves a driving test with an occupational therapist.

Based on the results of these assessments, the licensing authority will decide if you can continue to drive.

If the licensing authority decides that you can continue to drive, you will be issued with a conditional licence. Conditional licences are valid for a maximum of 12 months, after which time you will be reassessed.

Sometimes restrictions may also be placed on your licence. These restrictions might be that you can only drive close to home, or at certain times or below certain speed limits.

If you do not notify your licensing authority of your diagnosis, or if you continue to drive after your licence has been cancelled or suspended, there can be serious consequences. If you are in a car accident, you could be charged with driving offences or be sued. Your insurance company may not provide cover.

### **Signs that dementia may be affecting your driving skills include:**

- **Vision** Not being able to see straight ahead and to both sides.
- **Hearing** Being unable to hear approaching cars, car horns and sirens.
- **Awareness** Not being able to notice and understand what is happening around you.
- **Staying in your lane** Changing lanes unsafely or driving on the wrong side of the road.
- **Traffic lights** Being unable to stop (or go) at traffic lights at the right time.
- **Directions** Difficulty reading a map or using a navigation device. Mixing up left and right. Getting lost or taking a long time on familiar trips.
- **Making decisions** Being unable to make decisions quickly and well when driving.
- **Mood changes** Driving affecting your mood, such as feeling angry or upset.
- **Braking** Braking or accelerating at the wrong time.
- **Car damage** Finding new dents and scratches on the car which you can't explain.

## Giving up driving

There will come a time when you need to stop driving. This may be recommended by your doctor. Many people choose to stop driving because they feel confused, anxious, more tired or less confident.

Your car may be important to your independence, so giving up driving can be difficult.

You may feel angry, frustrated or upset about this change. It may help to discuss these feelings or seek support and information. You could try talking to:

- a trusted family member
- a friend
- Dementia Australia.

Some people find that there are benefits in no longer driving. The alternatives can be less stressful than driving, the costs are less than those needed to run a car, and you may have more energy for the things you can do well.

## Alternatives to driving

There are other ways for getting around. Understanding your options can help you stay independent and active for longer.

Things to try:

- asking a family member or friend to give you a lift
- using public transport, ride sharing or taxis
- using community transport (find out what your local council offers)
- walking (using navigation technology may be helpful)
- using home delivery services for food, medical prescriptions and your local library.

When you stop driving, it may be harder to make social trips like visiting friends or family, attending functions or participating in hobbies. It is important to maintain social contacts, so try to keep doing these things.

## Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia education program  
Visit: [\*\*dementia.org.au/education\*\*](https://dementia.org.au/education)
- Dementia Australia library service  
Visit: [\*\*dementia.org.au/library\*\*](https://dementia.org.au/library)
- Dementia Australia support  
Visit: [\*\*dementia.org.au/support\*\*](https://dementia.org.au/support)

### Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [\*\*dementia.org.au\*\*](https://dementia.org.au)**