

Driving and Memory Loss

Driving

Driving an automobile safely, particularly in a crowded urban area, takes complex thinking and judgment. Dementia raises the risk of accidents as much as 5 times. One study found that 3 out of 4 older people with dementia who continued to drive were involved in an accident.

Older drivers, particularly those with memory disorders, are generally cautious and careful. However, as any driver knows, a sudden event (such as a child running in front of the car, or an object in the road forcing a quick lane change) can turn a routine trip into a disaster if the driver does not make the absolute correct response.

Other concerns for people with dementia and their families are the possible legal problems that could result from an accident. A person with a known memory problem is likely to be blamed for any accident, no matter who is at fault. Financial losses could be extremely high, and insurers may not cover what they view as negligence in allowing the person to drive.

The loss of driving privileges is serious. It may threaten the independence not only of the driver but also of a couple or household, if the affected person is the primary or only driver. The person with the memory problem cannot understand others' concern because one of the first things lost to the disease is the ability to see his or her own limitations. The spouse also may be overwhelmed by the life style changes that the loss of driving would produce and argue for the person's continued driving despite concerns about safety.

***Coping with
Driving Issues
After Dementia
Is Diagnosed***

Here are some ways to cope with driving issues:

- The safest strategy is to stop driving. Let others drive.
- If this is unacceptable and the memory problem is mild, begin to plan for the time when driving is no longer possible.
- Special evaluations of driving skills are available in some areas- contact your local hospitals or rehabilitation programs for information.
- Stop all driving in unfamiliar, crowded, or congested areas during busy times of the day.

***When a Person
Is Unwilling To
Stop Driving***

If the person with a more severe memory problem is unwilling to stop driving, find out if you reside in a state that allows anyone to report the problem to the Department of Motor Vehicles. The report makes a driving test mandatory, and the person's license will be revoked if he or she fails the test. The identity of the person making the report is confidential.

Resources

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

Provides extensive information and a list of Internet resources on Safe Driving. Web site:

http://www.aarp.org/families/driver_safety/driver_safetyissues/

The Help Guide

A source of non-commercial information on mental health and aging well. This site has a section on the challenges of aging, with detailed information on driving safety in older adults and a list of many additional resources.

Web site: www.helpguide.org or

www.helpguide.org/elder/senior_citizen_driving.htm