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## Driving and Dementia

Dementia is a progressive impairment of brain function in older people. It can severely affect one's ability to drive safely. A victim will pass through stages of mild to moderate to severe dementia. With mild cases, it can result in forgetfulness and difficulty doing ordinary tasks, such as driving. As it progresses, severe memory loss, disorientation, paranoia, and personality changes can occur. Learn how to recognize the early signs and what to do about it to stay safe on the road.

### How Does Dementia Affect Driving?

Drivers in the earliest stage of dementia may not be dangerous, but as their condition progresses, they pose a greater threat to themselves and other drivers. Drivers with dementia are two to five times more likely to be involved in an accident than drivers without the condition. Seniors who recognize age-related changes and learn how to compensate for them can continue to drive safely for a long time.

Unfortunately, the onset of dementia is often harder to recognize than other changes, such as eyesight or physical limitations. Because dementia affects memory, concentration, and judgment, older drivers may not be able to differentiate when it's safe or not safe to get behind the wheel.

Some drivers with mild dementia may still possess the skills necessary to drive. They are required to take a driving test on a regular basis. However, a person diagnosed with moderate or severe dementia should have their driver's license revoked.

### Warning Signs

A person with early signs of dementia may show the following decline in their driving skills:

- Driving dangerously slow
- Confusion when stopping and changing lanes
- Becoming lost or disoriented on a familiar road or route
- Ignoring traffic lights and signs: often the color or order of the lights makes them confused, or they may just fail to notice them
- Inability to make sound judgments about what's happening on the road



### What to Do

If someone you know has dementia and continues to drive, discuss your concerns with them. It's important to raise the issue early, while they can still understand and make decisions about their driving future. Hopefully they will accept their own limitations and voluntarily decide to stop driving. If they are reluctant to stop driving, you may need to get help from other family members or the person's doctor.

The problem will not go away. In fact, it will only continue to get worse. It's better to take preventative action now than wait for tragedy to strike.

### Getting Around

If someone in your family can't drive any longer, it's critical that other family members step up to provide assistance in getting around. Regardless of age, it's important to help those suffering with dementia maintain a feeling of independence as long as possible.

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-- Beth Adamo

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- [California Department of Motor Vehicles -- Dementia](#) 

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