Booklets in the Living with dementia series

To order one free copy of each booklet (50p for each additional copy), telephone Xcalibre on 01628 529240 or email alzheimers@xcalibrefs.co.uk

Dementia and driving

Alzheimer’s Society
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Reviewed in 2008 by members of the Alzheimer’s Society Living with Dementia programme and revised 2010. This series of booklets has been made possible through the generous support of Francelle Bradford.

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Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Helpline
England and Wales 0845 3000 336 Northern Ireland 028 9066 4100
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If you drive a car and have been diagnosed with dementia you need to plan for the future.

You may still be able to drive safely for some time after you have been diagnosed. However, there will be a time when you have to stop driving. This will be for your safety and for the safety of other road users.

If you are still working and you drive as part of your job, you should talk to your employer. It may be possible to change the job you do so that you do not need to drive.

This booklet explains the legal issues around dementia and driving, and ways of coping if you can no longer drive.

What the law says

You must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) that you have dementia. If you don’t you are breaking the law and can be fined up to £1,000.

- Write to The Driver Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea SA99 1TU. You can telephone on 0870 6000 301.
- If you want to carry on driving, tell the DVLA when you get in touch. You will be sent a questionnaire to fill in.
- The DVLA will usually contact your GP or specialist about your dementia and may ask you to take a driving assessment. It will then decide if you can carry on driving.
- The DVLA may decide that you are not safe to drive. You have a right to appeal within six months if you live in England or Wales or within 21 days if you live in Scotland.

‘I gave up driving last year at 49. I had never had a dementia-related accident…but I would not have wanted my children in the car with someone like me.’

For practical information on all aspects of living with dementia contact the National Dementia Helpline on 0845 3000 336 (England and Wales) or 028 9066 4100 (Northern Ireland) or visit alzheimers.org.uk
If the DVLA allows you to continue driving, then your condition will be reviewed by them yearly. You can expect to have to re-apply for a driving licence each year, but you won’t have to pay a renewal fee and the DVLA will send you a renewal reminder form automatically.

If your doctor advises you to stop driving but you continue to do so, he or she will notify the DVLA.

A family member might tell the DVLA you are not fit to drive. You may receive a questionnaire about your condition asking for your consent to make enquiries of your GP or specialist, so that a decision can be made about whether you can continue driving.

You must tell your insurance company that you have dementia. Not telling your insurance company means your insurance may not be valid and will not cover you if you have an accident. It is illegal to drive without valid insurance cover.

Assessment centres

- You can ask to take a driving assessment and this may be helpful when you are considering whether to renew your driving licence.
- You should apply directly to an assessment centre and will need to pay a fee. A list of the centres is given at the end of this booklet.
- An assessment is not like a driving test. It is an overall assessment of the impact your dementia has on your driving performance and safety and makes some allowances for the bad habits we may get into.

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**Using assessment centres**

Bob, who has Pick’s disease (a type of dementia), talks about having his driving assessed:

‘I was smaring about not being able to drive. It was for me the worst feature of the whole disease and I thought it unjust.’

Bob’s consultant suggested the test centre assessment.

‘I had a full day’s test, first on simulators and then an hour and a half at the wheel.

‘And, of course, I failed, but I could see why I wasn’t safe,’ says Bob.

‘Not only were my reaction times slow, but if something approached me from the side, I just didn’t see it. When my attention is focused on one thing it takes an awful lot to make me aware of something else that is going on.’

**Tips for driving safely**

There are ways to make driving easier and safer:

- Keep to routes you know well.
- Avoid busy areas.
- Don’t drive at night.
- Don’t drive in bad weather.
- Keep your journey short.
- Leave plenty of time for your journey.
- Travel with a companion.
- Don’t drive when you are stressed or upset.

‘I lost concentration and my speed just got faster and faster.’

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When should I stop driving?

Most people give up driving as they get older, often because their eyesight is not as good or they find that they cannot judge distances accurately.

Sometimes it is obvious that you should stop driving. For example:

- You may feel less confident or get more irritated when you drive.
- You may feel confused if there are roadworks on a familiar route.
- You may have an accident.

But it isn’t always easy to know if you are still driving safely.

- Ask your family if they are concerned about your driving and listen to their views.
- Talk to your GP or specialist and ask their opinion.
- Ask to be referred to a driving assessment centre for an expert, unbiased opinion.

‘I chose to limit my driving because, without full awareness and control, I became an accident waiting to happen.’

If your partner relies on you to drive, you may feel extra pressure to continue driving. But it’s better to travel safely on a bus than to have an accident in the car.

Try easing yourself out of driving by reducing the amount you drive. It will allow you to get used to the idea. You could find that you don’t really need the car.

If you decide to give up driving, write to the DVLA telling it your decision and enclosing your driving licence.
Coping without a car

You probably rely on your car for trips to the supermarket, to visit family and to get to your place of worship or social events. It can be daunting to think of life without it.

But try to think positively and plan ahead. Find out about alternative ways of getting around, before you need to stop driving, so you can stay in control.

Remember, it is the dementia that is the problem not you. Having the illness is why you have to stop driving; it’s not a reflection on you as a person.

Talk to others in the same situation by joining a support group. Tell your family how you feel so that they can understand. You may feel angry but you may also feel relieved.

Why not take a bus, train or taxi and sit back and watch the world go by?

There are good things about not driving

- You don’t have to worry about finding somewhere to park.
- You don’t need to remember to take the car for an MoT or service.
- You won’t worry about the car breaking down.
- You save money by not paying for road tax and insurance.
- You won’t worry about navigating a route to somewhere new.
- You can sit back and enjoy the scenery.

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There are alternatives

- Take a taxi to the supermarket once a month to stock up. Book the taxi in advance and set up an account with a taxi firm you trust and like.
- Many areas have a shoppers’ bus that goes to the supermarket and back on a regular day each week.
- If you have a computer, use the internet to order your shopping and have it delivered to your home. You can use the computer to keep a shopping list so you don’t forget regular items.
- Perhaps a friend or member of the family can take you to the supermarket with them on a regular run.
- For trips into town, ask your local authority if there is a dial-a-ride bus in your area. You need to phone in advance to book the bus, so keep a note of when you are going.
- Ask your hospital about a driver to take you to your hospital appointments.
- Some areas offer older people free bus travel, others offer half price travel. Your local authority will tell you about these schemes.

- Ask your local railway station about cheaper train travel using a Railcard.
- Many coach holidays have local pick-up points.
- Pay your bills by direct debit so you don’t have to travel to the bank or post office too often.
- Have a mobile hairdresser visit your home.

Remember that, once you have sold the car, you are not paying to keep it on the road so you can afford to put the profit into a fund to pay for an occasional taxi. It may even be cheaper in the long run.

‘Life goes on. I am armed with bus tokens… and thankful to friends and family who get me to where I need or want to go.’

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Useful contacts

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Devon House
58 St Katharine’s Way
London E1W 1LB
T 020 7423 3500
E info@alzheimers.org.uk
alzheimers.org.uk

Drivers Medical Group
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
Swansea SA99 1TU
T 0300 790 6806
(Monday to Thursday 8am-8.30pm,
Friday and Saturday 8am-5.30pm)
E eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk
www.dvla.gov.uk/medical.aspx

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
(DVLA)
Swansea SA99 1TU
T 0300 790 6801
E drivers.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk
www.dvla.gov.uk
www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

Forum of mobility centres
T 0800 559 3636
www.mobility-centres.org.uk
Offers independent advice through
17 regional centres

Northern Ireland Mobility Centre
Disability Action
Portside Business Park
189 Airport Road
Belfast BT3 9ED
T 028 9029 7880
E mobilitycentre@disabilityaction.org
www.disabilityaction.org

Scottish Driving Assessment Service
Astley Ainslie Hospital
133 Grange Loan
Edinburgh EH9 2HL
T 0131 537 9192

Wales Mobility and Driving Assessment Service
Glan Clwyd Hospital
Bodelwyddan LL18 5UJ
T 01745 584858
Rookwood Hospital
Fairwater Road
Llandaff
Cardiff CF5 2YN
T 029 2055 5130

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