

Is it Time to Stop Driving?

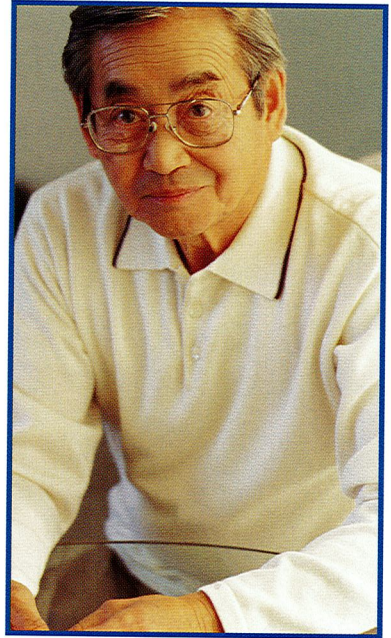
**PLAIN TALK ABOUT
DRIVING AND MEMORY PROBLEMS**

Companion Guide:
*Is Driving Your Best Choice? Practical Information
About Driving for People with Memory Problems*

Recognizing the Problem

Driving is a complex activity that requires a number of different skills including:

- Adequate vision and hearing.
- Good eye-hand coordination.
- Adequate muscle strength and joint flexibility.
- Ability to make quick, appropriate decisions.
- Ability to find one's way in familiar places.
- Ability to learn how to find one's way in unfamiliar places.
- Knowledge of the rules of the road.
- Ability to understand and obey road signs and signals.



Many of these skills are affected by memory disorders. People who develop chronic progressive memory problems such as Alzheimer's disease eventually experience difficulty with:



- Getting lost, at first in new places and later in familiar places; this is called **disorientation** or **visuospatial impairment**.

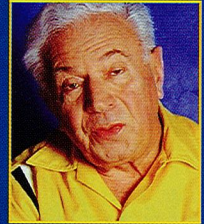
"I asked George to drive down to the corner store for bread and a gallon of milk. He came back three hours later and told me he couldn't find the store."

- Inability to think about more than one task at a time also called **limited attentional capacity**.

"As I backed out of the garage, the car door slammed against the wall of the garage. I forgot to close it before putting the car in reverse. It cost me \$250 to repair it."

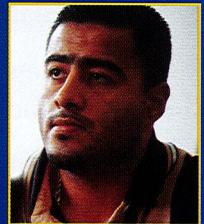
- Becoming overwhelmed at a busy intersection or in heavy traffic is another problem with **attentional capacity**.

"I caught myself going through a red light. Didn't realize it was there. I quit driving on my own."

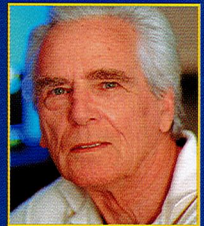


- Not recalling the purpose of various controls in the car and using them correctly is a problem called **apraxia**. This usually occurs later than the previously listed driving problems.

"Dad got in the car and started it but he couldn't remember the difference between the gas pedal and the brake. I asked him to move over and let me drive."



"Mom has a neighbor who comes over and starts the car for her because she can't figure out where to put the key anymore. I asked the neighbor to stop doing this."



- Inability to evaluate one's own driving ability is called **lack of insight** or **limitation in executive functioning**.

"Edie insists that the other drivers are rude and impatient, that they're the bad drivers, not her."

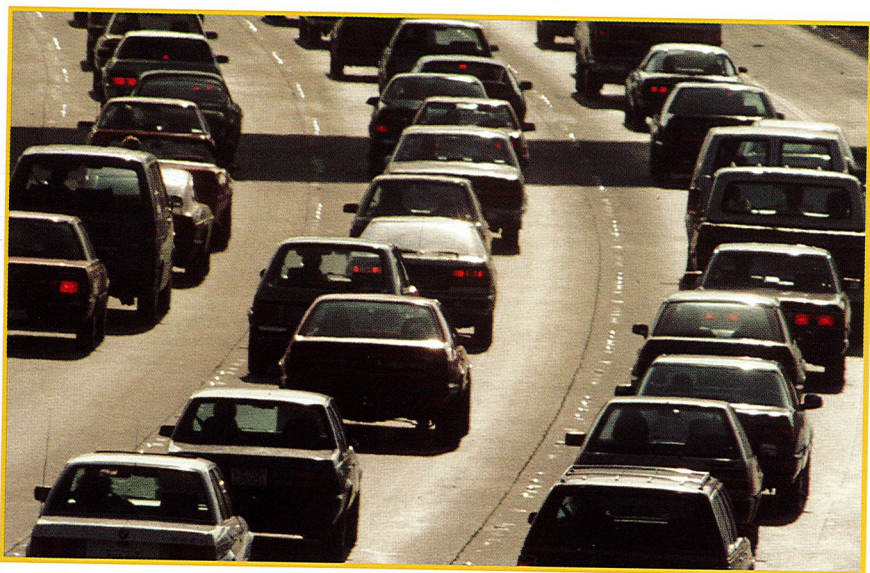
Giving up driving may be one of the most difficult choices a person with memory problems has to make. This guide and the companion booklet *Is Driving Your Best Choice?* are meant to help drivers with memory problems, their families and those who work with them through this decision making process.

The checklist on the following page can be used in discussion with an individual who is developing memory problems. The decision to stop driving should be based on **ability**, not on age or a diagnosis of memory disorder though either may indicate it is time for a re-evaluation.

Driving Self-Evaluation for People with Memory Problems

1. Have you gotten lost going some place familiar? Yes No
2. Has anyone told you that you should stop driving? Yes No
3. Have you gone through a red light or stop sign without realizing it? Yes No
4. Have you ever confused the brake and the gas pedal or had trouble deciding which one to use? Yes No
5. Have you hit or nearly hit someone or something? Yes No
6. Have you recently been stopped by a policeman who questioned how you were driving? Yes No
7. Have you ever thought or been told that you shouldn't drive with your grandchildren in the car? Yes No

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then it is time for you to talk about your driving with someone you trust and to have a driving evaluation.





When it is Time to Stop Driving

Getting the Conversation Started

While some people with memory problems decide on their own that it is time to stop driving, many need to be persuaded to do so. Experienced driving counselors say women are more easily persuaded to stop than men but this is not always the case.

The following are some tips for helping a person with memory problems make the decision to stop driving.

- Anticipate that it will become necessary to stop driving at some point and begin the discussion early to allow the person time to prepare for this decision.
- Try to be as tactful and as calm as possible.
- Point out specific errors "You just went through a stop sign" rather than using generalities "You never look where you're going."
- Find out early in the conversation what driving means to the person, its importance to him or her, and how the person would feel about giving it up.
- Choose a quiet time to talk about this privately, not in front of friends or in a public place.



The following are some suggestions about what to say and how to say it:

"You need to think about your driving."

"Have any of your friends given up driving? Why? How did they feel about it?"

"I'm sorry to have to say this, but you should not drive anymore. Here's why ..."

- Stay on the topic, don't bring up other problems or issues at the same time.
- Acknowledge the value of being able to drive and the losses/changes that will occur when the person must stop driving.
- Recognize that some people really love their cars and that being able to drive oneself is an important source of pride and independence for most adults.

Resistance

Be prepared for some resistance, especially if driving is very important to the person. It will probably be difficult to give up driving if the person...

- Is passionate about cars.
- Is very independent.
- Enjoys driving.
- Drives a great deal.
- Equates driving with freedom.
- Lives alone and has no one available to provide transportation.

On the other hand, it will be easier if the person...

- Is afraid to drive.
- Enjoys being driven by others.
- Accepts help from others.
- Seldom drives.
- Is accustomed to using other modes of transportation.
- Has a spouse, adult child or friend who is willing and able to drive him or her.

Whether the person is resistant or not, obtaining an official identification card to replace a driver's license and making sure the person has a house key to replace the car key may help ease the transition from driver to nondriver.

An alternative transportation plan is also essential. This is addressed in the last section of this booklet.

When Resistance Continues

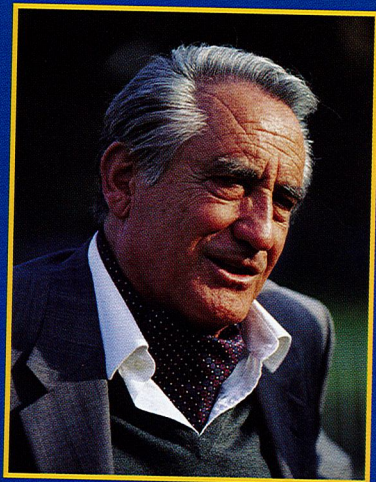
Sometimes discussion is not enough to persuade an individual with advancing memory problems to stop driving. When this occurs, the counsel of trusted advisors and/or people in authority often helps:



- *Priests, ministers, rabbis and other religious counselors* may point out that others, especially young children, may be at risk if the person continues to drive.
- *Doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, psychologists and other health care providers'* advice is usually taken seriously. Speak to them ahead of time about the driving problem. Once the advice to stop driving is put in a medical record, the legal risk involved in continuing to drive can be pointed out to the person with memory problems. Some doctors are willing to write their stop driving advice as a "prescription."
- *Policemen and other law enforcement officers* are sometimes called upon to urge a person with memory problems to stop driving. This is especially effective if they know the person.
- *Attorneys, accountants and other financial advisors* may be called on to point out the legal and financial risks of continuing to drive.
- *Driver Testing Center Staff*, both the official motor vehicle centers and private driver testing centers, offer objective evaluations. If possible, those that specialize in testing people with memory problems should be consulted but these centers are not available in every community.

When Neither Discussion Nor Advice are Effective

- Sometimes an analysis of the cost of keeping a car is persuasive. A form for doing this analysis is on the next page.
- Sometimes making a plan for meeting the person's transportation needs using alternative transportation is helpful. (Use the form at the end of this guide).
- For other people, the possibility that they might harm a grandchild or beloved pet if they drive in an unsafe manner may be the most persuasive reason to stop.
- Discussion of the legal risks may be persuasive to some as well.



When Persuasion Fails

There are more drastic measures that can be taken if the person should not drive but absolutely refuses to stop and cannot be persuaded to stop. Even these are not foolproof. Families tell stories of loved ones that drive after their license has been revoked or calling a mechanic to repair a car that the family deliberately disabled to keep a loved one from driving.

- Keep the car out of sight and put the keys in a new place where they are not easily found.
- Tell a "therapeutic fib" that the car won't work, the keys are lost or the insurance was cancelled.
- Disable the car or put an antitheft device on the steering wheel to lock it.
- Sell the car or give it away.
- Report the person to the Division of Motor Vehicles.

The above are last resort measures that risk greatly upsetting people or losing their trust. However, it is sometimes necessary to take these steps to prevent serious injury or death from a motor vehicle accident.

How Much Does My Car Cost to Own and Drive?

Owning and driving your own car costs a lot of money. Most people don't really know how much their car costs them every year. This form will help you determine how much your car (truck or van) costs you every year.

| CAR EXPENSES | | | |
|--|---|--|------------------------------|
| Some expenses are <i>monthly</i> and some are <i>yearly</i> | Write down the cost of each item in this column | Calculate the yearly cost of each item | Then add up all of the items |
| 1. My monthly car payment is: (Write 0 if you do not have a car payment) | \$ | X 12 = | \$ |
| 2. My approximate yearly car maintenance cost is: (include oil changes) | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 3. This year I had repair or replacement work done on my car and the cost was approximately: (For example: new tires, battery, replace brakes, bodywork and paint, transmission work, electrical system work, air conditioning, ignition, fuel system, engine, etc.). | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 4. I pay auto insurance monthly and it costs: | \$ | X 12 = | \$ |
| OR | | | |
| I pay auto insurance annually and it costs: | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 5. Yearly my auto license plate/decal costs: | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 6. Yearly my auto emissions test costs: | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 7. Monthly I spent approximately this much on gasoline, parking fees and tolls: | \$ | X 12 = | \$ |
| 8. This year I spent this much on traffic and parking tickets: | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| 9. This year I spent this much on car crashes: (For example: payments to other drivers, medical expenses for you and passengers, property damages etc.) | \$ | X 1 = | \$ |
| TOTAL COST OF MY CAR THIS YEAR IS: | | | \$ |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| My car is a: Model: | Year: | The Blue Book Value of my car is: |
| My car has this many miles: | | I plan to buy a new car in: |

Acknowledgement: Developed by the Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Inc. and the University of South Florida through a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation.

What's Next: Developing a Plan for Alternative Modes of Transportation

Once the person has stopped driving, it is essential to develop a plan for alternative transportation. Too often, plans are simplistic and inappropriate for a person with memory problems. For example, anyone who gets lost in familiar places would have a very difficult time using public transport, buses, subways or metrorail systems, all of which require the ability to find one's way through a complex system. Another common assumption is that bringing services, food and medication to the person will solve the problem. Home delivery is very helpful but its use as the sole alternative can cause severe social isolation. A trip to the supermarket is a social event as well as an opportunity to purchase food.

Keeping these things in mind, the following are some alternatives to discuss with the person when helping develop an alternative transportation plan:

- Do you have someone nearby who can drive you?
- Can a friend give you a ride to religious services or to your club meeting?
- Is it possible to walk to the store or post office? Can you do this without getting lost?
- Can you pay a neighbor to drive you?
- Are taxis available in your neighborhood?
- Is there a home delivered meals service for older people in your community? Restaurants that will deliver hot meals?
- Are delivery services available at your supermarket, pharmacy, department store, etc.?
- Ask your church, temple, doctor, senior center, healthcare clinic, etc., if they offer transportation.
- Can you obtain some things through mail order or catalogs?
- Can you move to a community that provides transportation or is within easy walking distance of essential services?
- Don't forget, you can call 911 in an emergency. You do not have to drive and probably shouldn't if there's a real emergency.



Worksheet for Developing an Alternative Transportation Plan

Use this worksheet to create a plan for retirement from driving. Compare the convenience, availability and cost of various types of transportation.

1. List your regular transportation needs, including appointments, errands, visits and shopping trips.

| TRANSPORTATION NEED | DAY | TIME | VARIES |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|------------------|
| Doctor Appointment | Thursdays | 2:00 pm | Every other week |
| Lunch Bunch | Wednesdays | Noon – 2:00 pm | |
| Evening Services | | | |
| | | | |
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2. List the types of alternative transportation available in your community.

| TRANSPORTATION TYPE | DAYS OF OPERATION | HOURS OF OPERATION | ROUTE | AVAILABLE ON WEEKENDS & HOLIDAYS? | COST | CAN YOU AFFORD? |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Community Shuttle | Daily | 6:00 am to 6:00 pm | Magnolia Ave. | No | 25¢ a ride | Yes |
| Taxi | Daily | Around the clock | County-wide | Yes | | |
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3. Compare your needs with your alternatives.

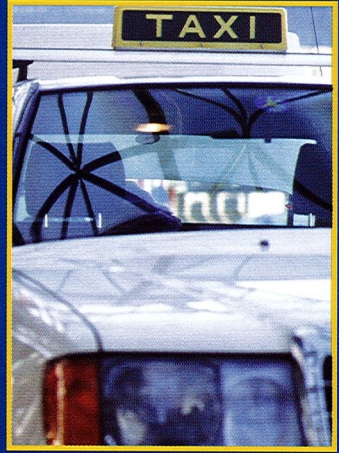
| TRANSPORTATION NEED | TRANSPORTATION TYPE | PROS | CONS | CAN IT WORK FOR YOU? |
|---------------------|---------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| Grocery Store | Shuttle | Hours OK. Stops near home one block. Inexpensive | Difficult with heavy packages. Need assistance on and off. Need wheeled cart. | Yes – with help and cart. |
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What You Can Do

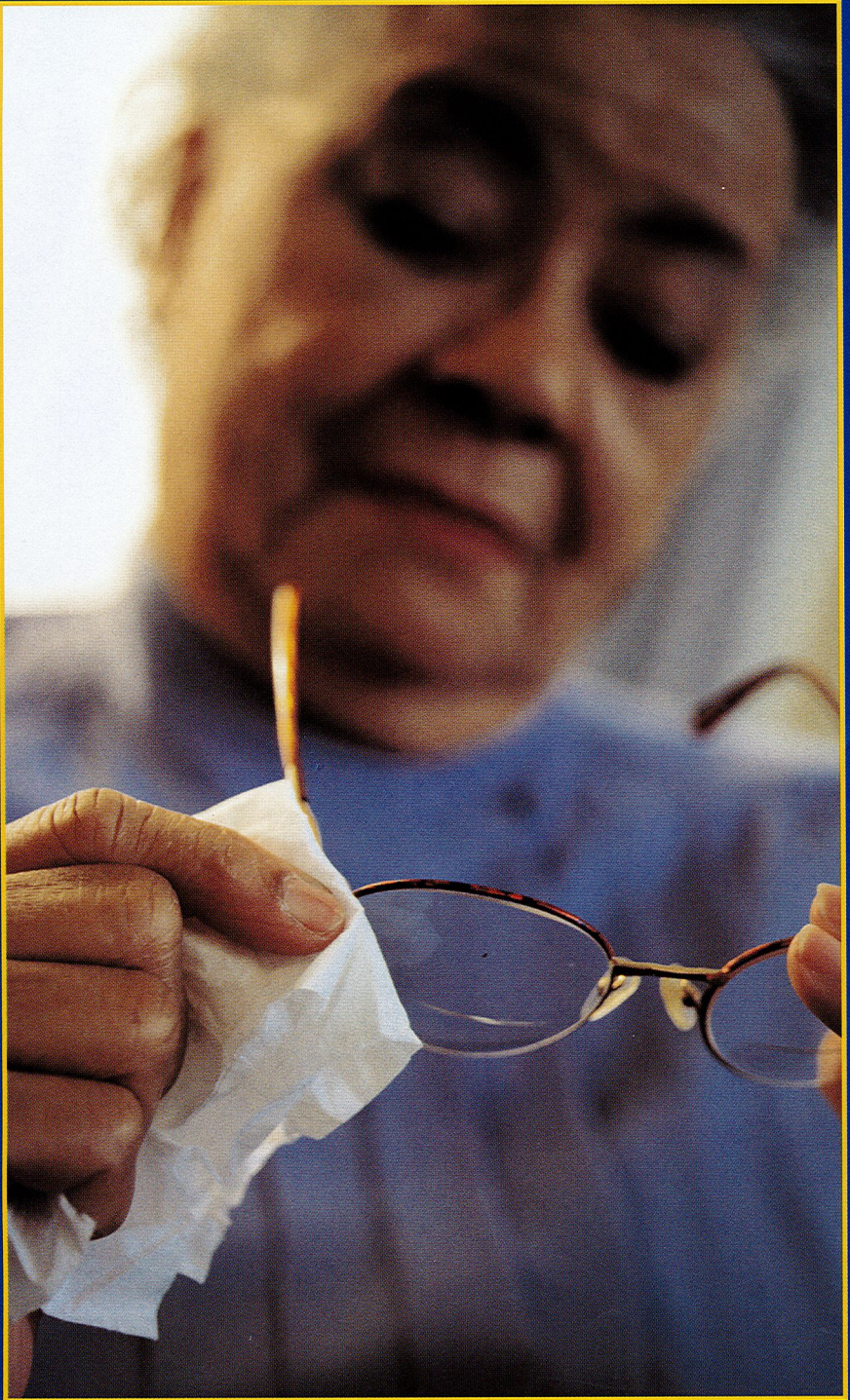
Your local Area Agency on Aging can suggest transportation services and benefits that may be helpful. Find out if there is an agency for the transportation disadvantaged that may offer assistance.

Also, ask for help from an Alzheimer's support organization, senior (or elder) help line, senior center or religious organizations. Some of these organizations may be able to help.

- Learn what is available in your community and what is appropriate for the person.
- Potential services include:
 - Taxi cabs and personalized driver services.
 - Shuttle buses, such as those offered by churches, senior centers and retirement communities.
 - City buses, trams and train systems.
- A friend may be available to help the person learn how to use public transportation.
- Going with someone who knows how to ride the bus or train may make the person feel more secure and prevent getting confused or lost.
- Ask questions about the services and schedules of each type of transportation available, including whether they offer evening or weekend rides.

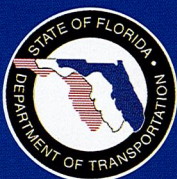


It is not always easy to find good substitutes for driving one's own car. But it is important to help the person avoid becoming socially isolated just because he or she can no longer drive.



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