

Dementia and Mild Cognitive Impairment Driving Safety

Good drivers are alert, think clearly, and make good decisions. When the person with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or dementia is not able to do these things, he or she should stop driving. However, he or she may not want to stop and may not even think there is a problem. As the caregiver, you will need to talk with the person about retiring from driving. This is often a tremendous loss for individuals with MCI/dementia. Understand how unhappy the person may be that he or she has reached this new stage.

"Driving with my husband was scary. At red lights, he'd go into the middle of the intersection before stopping. I knew he needed to stop driving."

Starting the conversation

If possible, it is helpful to start conversations about driving while the person with MCI or dementia is still a safe driver. Some families include discussions about driving when they are doing other future planning activities. To help a person with decisions about driving:

- ✓ Begin the conversation as soon as possible and involve the provider if possible
- ✓ Involve the person with dementia in the planning and decision-making
- ✓ Talk about the safety of the driver and others
- ✓ Appeal to the person's sense of responsibility
- ✓ Consider mentioning the potential legal liability of driving with MCI/dementia
- ✓ Be aware of the person's feelings about this change. A person with dementia may perceive giving up driving as a loss of independence, and/or that deciding not to drive means accepting that one's abilities are changing.
- ✓ If possible, have the person with mild dementia sign a driving contract. The contract will give you permission to help him or her stop driving when necessary.

Making the transition

Research shows the best way to know when it is time for a person with MCI/dementia to stop driving is when family members no longer feel safe driving with them. In preparation for the transition, find other ways that your person can travel on his or her own, for as long as possible. Even when someone with MCI/dementia is still driving, you can begin to shift to other transportation options. Your local Area Agency on Aging ((866) 552-4464 <https://aging.georgia.gov/locations>) has information about transportation services in your area. These services may include free or low-cost buses, taxi service, rideshare options, or carpools for older people. Some churches and community groups have volunteers who take seniors wherever they want to go.

Initially, it may not be “all or nothing”

A person may need to give up driving at night, but they may be able to drive during the day.

A person may be able to drive in the neighborhood, but freeways may be overwhelming.

In these instances, you can agree to limit the times and situations in which a person drives.

Signs that a person should stop driving

- ✓ Reports from the person or others that they got lost or didn't recognize where they were when driving. (While getting lost is not a driving hazard in and of itself, it can cause anxiety)

that can become hazardous. Additionally, no one wants to be lost and not be able to find their way home!)

- ✓ New dents and scratches on the car
- ✓ Accidents
- ✓ Taking a long time to do a simple errand and not being able to explain why. That may indicate that the person got lost.

What to do if someone refuses to stop driving

As mentioned earlier, retiring from driving can be one of the most difficult losses for someone with MCI/dementia. Sometimes a person may refuse to stop driving or may agree but then forget they have agreed and take the car out.

If someone is refusing to stop driving you might:

- Try talking about your concerns with the person.
- Ask your provider to tell him or her to stop driving.
- Request a prescription for a driving examination. These are provided by specially trained occupational therapists to determine a person's fitness to drive. A list of places in Georgia that provide these exams is found at the end of this document. They vary with regard to whether they require a prescription/referral and cost, so it's a good idea to ask about these details.
- Request that your provider begin the medical review process with the State Department of Driver Services (DDS). In Georgia, DDS will send the person a letter that they must provide documentation of safety to drive within 30 days or their license will be revoked.

If someone drives because they forget they've agreed not to you might:

- Hide the car keys, move the car, take out the distributor cap, or disconnect the battery.
- Ask your provider for a prescription that says, "Do not drive" and you can show this to the person.
- Ask friends and family to drive the person for errands on a regular basis.
- Find out about services that help people with disabilities get around their community.

Please remember:

If the person with MCI or dementia keeps driving when it is no longer safe, someone could get hurt or killed. Maintaining safety of the person with MCI/dementia as well as the safety of others on the road can be exhausting. BUT, it can literally be a matter of life and death. If you need additional support, your person's PCP, neurologist, or other provider may have ideas. The Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) and The Hartford (https://s0.hfdstatic.com/sites/the_hartford/files/cmme-crossroads.pdf) also have excellent information on this topic.

Location	Street Address	Phone	Website
Emory Decatur Hospital (previously Dekalb Medical) Driving Solutions Program	2701 North Decatur Road Decatur, GA 30033	(404) 501-5155 (audiology) (404) 401-5140 (OT)	https://www.dekalbmedical.org/our-services/rehab/outpatient-rehabilitation/services
Emory Outpatient Rehabilitation Services	1441 Clifton Road Atlanta, GA 30322 (main location) various other locations in town	404-712-5527 404-712-5974 (fax)	
Freedom and Mobility	1255 Kennestone Circle Suite 240 Marietta, GA 30066	770-514-9957 770-874-1703 (fax)	https://freedomandmobility.com/
Northeast GA Health Center	743 Spring Street Gainesville, GA 30501	770-219-8200 770-219-3862 (fax)	https://www.nghs.com/pre-driving-evaluation
Sheperd Spinal Center	2020 Peachtree Road, NW Atlanta, GA 30309	404-350-7760 (for scheduling) (404) 350-7722 (Matt Abisamra)	https://www.shepherd.org/patient-programs/outpatient-clinics/adapted-driving-services
Sovereign Rehabilitation	5553 Peachtree Road Suite 105 Chamblee, GA 30341	770-687-2160 770-558-1501 (fax)	https://www.sovereignrehab.com/atlanta-driver-evaluations
Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation Driving Evaluation and Training Program	1 Siskin Plaza Chattanooga, TN 37403	423-634-1368 (Leanna - scheduler) 423-634-4578 (fax)	https://www.siskinrehab.org/rehabilitation-services/outpatient/driving-evaluation-program/
Atlanta VA Medical Center	1670 Clairmont Road Decatur, GA 30033	(404) 321-6111	
Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center	1 Freedom Way Mailing Route 27-ADR Augusta, GA 30904	706-733-0188 ext. 6980	

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