

Driving and Dementia

Many people with dementia are able to keep driving for some time following diagnosis. It is important to know what you need to do if you wish to continue driving.

Legal requirements

British law assumes that you have a right to drive. The law only intervenes when medical conditions impair driving ability. The legal position is that a driver has to be able to drive on his or her own without help from anyone else. However, dementia affects reaction speed and decision-making so you may have problems in busy traffic or when something unexpected happens, such as another car stopping suddenly. You may be able to carry on driving, but it is important to make sure you are still safe to drive.

If you have a diagnosis of dementia and you have a driving licence, you should:

- » Inform the DVLA - If you don't tell the DVLA you are breaking the law and you can be fined up to £1,000. They will send you a questionnaire and request reports from your doctor. They may need you to have a driving assessment. The Medical Advisers at DVLA will take the final decision based on the information they receive.
- » Tell your insurance company – if you don't and you have an accident they may not pay up, even if the accident was not your fault. It is a criminal offence to drive without third party insurance cover.
- » Check with your doctor – if the doctor is not sure whether or not you are able to keep driving, they may refer you for a driving assessment.
- » Take sensible steps to reduce risk – avoid difficult driving conditions, like busy traffic, fast roads or long trips. Some medication can affect your driving, for example by making you drowsy. Make sure you don't drive if you feel tired.
- » Tell your employer if you drive with your job.
- » Check with people around you to find out if they have any safety concerns for you or others if you continue to drive.

The Driving Assessment Service

You may be referred (or you can ask your doctor to refer you) to the Scottish Driving Assessment Service (SDAS). The service is part of the NHS and is free. The SDAS is based in Edinburgh and they have a mobile service for other parts of Scotland. You may have to wait for an appointment. Their staff will assess your driving carefully. The SDAS will report back to the doctor who referred you and will also put any recommendation in writing to you to send on to the DVLA. If the DVLA allow you to continue driving, they will probably issue a one year licence. At the end of a year you can reapply and be reviewed.

Is it safe to drive?

Sometimes it is obvious that driving is no longer a good idea. You may find that you are feeling less confident, or you might scare yourself with a near miss. But it isn't always easy to know yourself if you are still safe.

Are you worried about someone else's driving?

If you are worried about someone else's driving it is important to discuss it. Sometimes, however, someone with dementia can't see that there is a problem. In this case, you may need to take action yourself by contacting the DVLA Drivers' Medical Group. They will treat the information sensitively and in confidence. They will not tell the driver who contacted them.

The DVLA will send the person with dementia a routine letter and a form to complete. The form asks if there is anything they would like to inform the DVLA about and includes, among other things, a question relating to memory and dementia. The form also seeks permission to access the person's medical records. This form must be completed by law. Failure to do so will not prevent the DVLA from accessing the person's medical records.

Further information and useful contacts

DVLA Drivers' Medical Group, Swansea, SA99 1TU, **0870 600 030** (please note 0870 numbers can be costly)

Scottish Driving Assessment Service, Mobility Centre, Astley Ainslie Hospital, 133 Grange Loan, Edinburgh, EH9 2HL, **0131 537 9192**

You can call the Alzheimer Scotland 24 hour freephone Dementia Helpline on **0808 808 3000** for further information or advice on anything that is worrying you about dementia or visit www.alzscot.org

This leaflet has been prepared to provide information for people with dementia, and for their carers.