

Driving and Alzheimer's/Dementia

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Deciding if and when it's time to stop driving is an extremely difficult and emotional time. When Alzheimer's or dementia occurs, a decision will need to be made as to when an individual is no longer capable of operating an automobile safely. The individual's independence needs to be measured against the potential hazards to themselves and the community. An evaluation by the driver rehabilitation specialist can be of great value in helping to make this difficult decision. A driver evaluation will assess the components of driving that may be compromised by this progressive condition. Areas assessed should include: attention, processing speed, visual spatial functioning, decision-making, judgment, planning, memory, and behavior.

An evaluation is recommended when a diagnosis or problems first arise. Compensatory strategies can be used to help maintain safe driving, and to set limits in preparation for the inevitable. Discussing the issue, and planning for the future, is important to do while the individual has the insight needed to participate.

Warning signs to look for are:

- Driving too slowly
- Doesn't observe signs or signals
- Difficulty interpreting traffic situations and predicting changes
- Failure to yield
- Easily frustrated or confused
- Frequently gets lost
- Needs instructions from passengers
- Poor road position or driving the wrong way down streets

If you or someone you know is having any of the above warning signs, a driver evaluation may be indicated. A driver rehabilitation specialist with knowledge about medical conditions can provide a comprehensive evaluation to determine one's ability to drive.

