



If you are concerned about a person's driving ability, you might first approach the problem by discussing it frankly with the individual. Even though people are cognitively impaired, they are still able to participate in decisions that involve them. How you initiate such a discussion may affect their response.

Individuals with dementia are sometimes less able to tolerate criticism than when they were well so you will want to use tact in such a discussion.

Giving up driving can mean admitting one's increasing limitations. Look for ways to help the individual maintain his/her dignity at the same time you respond to the need for safety. Try offering alternatives such as "I'll drive today and you can look at the scenery."

Try to involve others in discouraging the individual from driving. Family members can offer to drive the individual places or do errands for them so there is less need for them to go out in the car.

### **How The Chapter Serves The Community:**

The Chapter is a not-for-profit organization of volunteers, laypersons, and health care professionals committed to working together to accomplish our mission.

### **Our Mission:**

To eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

### **Vision Statement**

A world without Alzheimer's disease.

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### **Midlands Chapter**

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# **Driving And The Individual With Alzheimer's**



*The time will come when the individual with Alzheimer's disease can no longer drive safely.*

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### **Midlands Chapter**

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[www.alz.org/midlands](http://www.alz.org/midlands)

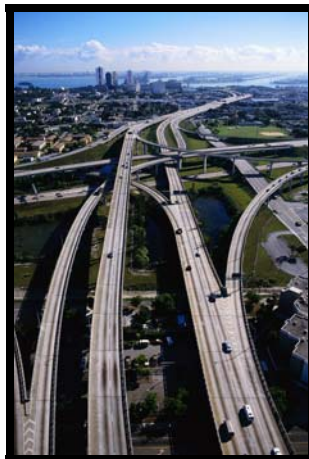
Frequently, individuals with Alzheimer's disease (AD) or other similar dementias do not realize or accept that their skills are no longer as sharp as they once were. It is often difficult for family members to tell their loved ones that they no longer have the skills necessary to drive a car safely.

Driving is a well-learned skill and a confused person can still *appear* to be driving well when he/she is not really a safe driver. Driving requires a highly complex interaction of eyes, brain, and muscle and the ability to solve complicated problems quickly.

A person who is still apparently driving safely may have lost the ability to respond appropriately to an unexpected problem on the road. He/she may be relying entirely on the habits of driving and may be unable to change quickly from a habitual response to a new response when the situation demands it.

The results of a study conducted at John Hopkins University strongly supports the recommendation that individuals with AD should not drive once a diagnosis has been given.

Nobody knows how many American with AD cause automobile accidents however; it is a good idea for physicians, at the correct time, to consider directing an individual with AD to stop driving.



### Caregivers should look for the following signs which would indicate that the AD individual should no longer drive:

- Forgetting how to get to familiar places.  
*May get lost on routes that would not have confused them previously.*
- Not following traffic signs.  
*The confused driver may not notice traffic signs.*
- Poor judgment of distance.  
*Turns that are too wide or too tight or running over curbs.*
- Poor decisions in traffic.  
*Not yielding right-of-way, and/or slow reactions to emergencies.*
- Speed not right for conditions.  
*Sometimes driving too slowly is a clue that driver's are uncertain of their skills.*
- Becoming confused or angry easily while driving.  
*May think that other individuals are "out to get them."*

**Families are often reluctant to take the keys from an AD family member, and the individual with AD may resist such attempts. Many professionals and experienced caregivers recommend these methods:**

- Have the family physician write or tell the individual that he/she can no longer drive.  
*Having a letter allows the family to refer to it as often as necessary.*
- Disable the car by removing the distributor cap or some other part.  
*The distributor cap is small and easy to replace when you want to drive the car. A gas station attendant can show you how to do this.*
- Move the car to another location.  
*"The car is in the shop," or park it away from viewing distance from the house.*
- Keep the keys in an unfamiliar place.  
*If the family car keys have always been kept on a hook in the kitchen, move the keys to a different location.*
- Alter the ignition key or switch it with an old key.  
*Some individuals with AD feel more secure with keys in their pockets.*
- Notify the local motor vehicle authorities to call the individual with AD in for testing.  
*Some states vary in their policies regarding a driver's license. Call the Department of Motor Vehicles to find out the policy in your area. In Nebraska call (402) 471-3861 and in Iowa call (800) 532-1121.*