



Fact Sheet

Emory Alzheimer's Disease Research Center
Wesley Woods Health Center, 1841 Clifton Rd., Atlanta, GA 30329
Grady Neurology Clinic, 80 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive SE, Atlanta, GA 30303
404-728-6950 <http://med.emory.edu/ADRC/>

DRIVING AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Driving is considered a "right" in the United States. Most people begin driving by the age of 15 (in rural areas of the country they begin even younger) and assume they will continue to drive until they die. However this is often not possible when someone has Alzheimer's Disease or a related disorder.

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive disorder causing people to have increasing problems with their memory and other cognitive functions over a period of years. Initially people may have problems only with their memory. However as AD progresses, other cognitive functions such as decision-making and judgment become affected by the disease.

Driving is a very complex process requiring a person to use many cognitive functions. Because cognitive functions are affected by AD it is important to evaluate on an ongoing basis the ability of a person to continue to drive. At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving published by The Hartford company is an excellent resource for people concerned about when someone with Alzheimer's should no longer drive. (see reference below)

Identifying a Driving Concern

Often the family is the first one to question if a person should still be driving. An open discussion with the person with AD may result in their agreeing to discontinue driving. However, often the person with AD refuses to give up driving.

A physician is usually the next person to consult related to driving ability. The family needs to be very open with the physician about any concerns

related to driving. Because people with AD are not reliable informants, family input is extremely important. Should the person with AD be a driving risk, the physician will often tell them to stop driving.

Many times the person with AD will heed the physician's recommendation and stop driving

Driving Evaluations

Physicians may recommend a driving evaluation if there is a question about the persons driving capabilities. A driving evaluation is available at some rehabilitation centers and is usually completed by an occupational therapist. A physician must "order" a driving evaluation. Not all insurance companies pay for a driving evaluation therefore you will want to discuss the cost of the evaluation when scheduling the appointment. Expect to pay a minimum of \$300 for a driving evaluation even if insurance is paying for part of the evaluation.

The driving evaluation includes a pre-driving skills evaluation and a behind-the-wheel evaluation. The physician will be given the driving evaluation results and will usually talk with the person about the results of the driving evaluation and recommend they stop driving if they failed the evaluation. If the person with AD passed the evaluation the physician should continue to evaluate the disease progression and its impact on driving at each appointment. Because AD is a progressive disorder driving evaluations may be recommended again in the future.

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Refusing to Stop Driving

It is not uncommon for people with AD to be so impaired there is no need for a driving evaluation, yet they insist they are capable of driving. It is also common for people with memory problems to fail the driving test, forget they took the test and continue to drive.

The Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS) states that a family member or a physician can send a letter to the Medical Unit of the DDS stating the name, address, date of birth and the medical reason the person should not be driving. The DDS will send a medical form to the person and ask that they have the form completed by their physician within 30 days. If they fail to have the form completed by their physician and returned within 30 days their license is revoked.

Because the DDS process for removing a license may change you can contact their office directly for updated information. (see Resources below)

But mother forgets she can not drive!

It is time to take more drastic action, such as removing the keys (all sets of the keys) from the home and/or disabling the car so it will not operate. You may need to cancel the AAA coverage so they will not help get the car operational again. Some families have had to call the car repair businesses and tell them not to repair the car when their family member calls. One family removed the car from their home (after informing the police so if their father reported the car stolen they would not be charged with theft).

In addition you need to develop an alternate plan for transportation so the person with AD will not become isolated.

Conclusion

Driving is one of the most difficult issues for the person with AD and their family to resolve. Seek the consultation you need to support you and your family member thorough this difficult phase. Remember that you are protecting your family member as well as other innocent people.

Resources:

Outpatient Driver Rehabilitation Program, (Pre-driving and "behind-the-wheel" evaluations) Center for Rehabilitation Medicine, Emory Healthcare, 404-712-5527 (FAX 404-712-5974).

Georgia Department of Driver Services, Attention Medical Unit, P.O. Box 80447, Conyers, GA, 30013. Their phone number is 678-413-8417.. See their website for additional information: <http://www.dds.ga.gov/>.

Emory Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, Cognitive Neurology Clinic, Wesley Woods Health Center, 1841 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30329, 404-728-4936.

References:

Morris, John C. Ed, Alzheimer Disease and Driving: Clinical, Research, and Public Policy. *Alzheimer Disease and Associated Disorders: An International Journal* 1997; 11(suppl 1).

At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving: Available online through The Hartford website at <http://www.thehartford.com/alzheimers/brochure.html>.

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