

Series: *Driving and Progressive Dementia*

Session 1: Safe Driving

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Purpose of Series: Driving and Progressive Dementia

*The purpose of the series of educational sessions called **Driving and Progressive Dementia** is to describe briefly issues of driving safety especially as driver skills change in people who have declines in memory and thinking functions. [Note: In these educational sessions “Driving” refers to driving any motor vehicle or any all-terrain vehicle, for example a car, a truck, a dune buggy, a van, an SUV, a trailer, a motorcycle, a golf cart, a lawn mower, a motor boat or motorized water bikes, a motorized scooter, a snowmobile... in other words any kind of moving vehicle with a motor.]*

*There are three sessions. **Session One: Safe Driving** focuses on the importance of the driver who may be undergoing general health changes and ways to stay safe when operating a motor vehicle. **Session Two: Safe Driving and Mild Cognitive Impairment** focuses on the driving issues related to the person who is having some mild short-term memory problems and perhaps some very early signs of occasional difficulty in other thinking functions, but appears to be functioning normally on a daily basis. **Session Three: Safe Driving and Alzheimer's Disease or a Related Dementia (Memory Disorder)** focuses on the driving issues related to the person who is dealing with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related progressive memory disorder (dementia). **This first session is on Safe Driving.***

Session 1: Safe Driving

Driving Safely

As a safe driver a person must be able to see well, to move arms and legs quickly and skillfully, and to have good memory, especially short-term memory. Also, critical are excellent concentration, good judgment, making the right choices, being adaptable to change, especially sudden changes while driving, and being able to complete complicated tasks. Also necessary are being able to think about the current situation while constantly taking in new information and

quickly adjusting driving behavior are also necessary. As people experience changes in physical function, increased stress, multiple demands for their attention and time, and declines in health, their ability to be safe drivers may suffer. Though as a group, older drivers experience fewer accidents as they age, their rate of death increases, whether or not they are at fault in an accident, due to their increased frailty.

Demands on Driver Skills

Driving is a demanding, highly complicated task. As you drive on the road, small rocks suddenly may hit your windshield or pieces from retread tires may slap the side of your car. The driver in front of you who has been signaling a turn to the left, at the last minute may turn right or stop suddenly. The car next to you may have a sudden flat tire, a “blowout”, which may result in that car turning suddenly into the side doors of your car.

To drive safely, you must one must be able to react quickly to such possible dangers or to other risky traffic conditions. Safe driving requires focus, good judgment, the ability to reason and making good decisions. Safe drivers also must be able to see possible driving risks ahead of time and adjust the handling of their vehicle to avoid danger. Safe drivers must keep their car (and other motor vehicles they drive) in top working condition.

😊 **Safe Driving** 😊

Under your control:

- ★ **YOU, the driver, must be alert, healthy, skilled, careful and calm.**
- ★ **Your car must be well maintained.**

***Not under your control:* the weather, the road & other drivers ! ! !**

Buckle up !!! Safety Tips for Safe Driving Buckle up !!!

1. At all times: be alert, listen, and look for other vehicles in front of, next to, or behind you. What are they doing and how does that affect what you should be doing?
2. Check eye health and glasses regularly.
3. Check hearing and hearing aids regularly.
4. Keep all glass surfaces (includes eyeglasses) and mirrors clean.
5. Adjust side and rear-view mirrors for best, fullest views for you. Wide-range mirrors may help.

not scanning the road and other drivers
not listening fully to what others are saying
not remembering what others just said

These signs, just listed, need to be discussed with your doctor, who may need to change the dose or change the actual medicine.

National Resources for More Information

American Pharmacists Association www.pharmacyandyou.org

National Association of Chain Drug Stores www.nacds.org

***Ask your doctor and pharmacist if a medicine(s)
will affect driving.***

Refresher Courses

Take a driver refresher or driver safety school course designed to improve and update driver skills. Special courses offered to older persons may suggest wider range rearview mirrors, driving at low traffic times, and avoiding busy intersections or high speed highways. [One such course is the AARP Driver Safety Program. It is an 8 hour refresher course for drivers age 50. Some insurance companies offer reduced rates on a driver insurance policy with proof of attending a driver safety course. More information is available at 1-888-AARP-NOW (1-888-227-7669) or www.aarp.org/drive.]

Risks When Driving

1. Poor vision
2. Poor hearing
3. Limits on movement; unable to move quickly
4. Weak muscles
5. Poor memory, especially short-term memory
6. Short or poor concentration
7. Poor judgment
8. Making poor decisions or wrong choices such as wrong turns or not stopping at a red light
9. Unable to do tasks with more than two steps
10. Unable to deal with sudden change
11. Unable to see ahead and predict problems
12. On medicine that makes you slow or sleepy

Plan Ahead: You may outlive your ability to drive safely !!

As part of retirement planning, people should plan ahead for mobility changes during retirement. As changes occur, transportation choices may need to change. The person who was the regular family driver may need to give up the driver privileges because of health changes. Health changes such as arthritis or reduced vision may result in an obvious need to stop driving. Less obvious are declines in driving skills resulting from other health changes such as Alzheimer's disease or related disorder such as Lewy body disease or a frontal temporal lobar degeneration (see AlzOnline.net information concerning these health conditions).

There may be other family members, neighbors, volunteer drivers from community groups, buses or vans that transport people who are residents of a community or who are participants in special programs. Some of the programs have limits on the type of riders or the number of rides each week. Some rides are available on a fixed schedule from Monday through Friday; others have a varied schedule which depends on the needs of the riders.

Some non-profit groups provide rides for sliding-scale fees, minimal fees, or donations. Some transportation services such as taxis require more resources from users. People who no longer are spending money on car maintenance, car insurance, tolls or gasoline may now be able to cover the costs of an occasional (or regular) taxi or van service.

Specific details on choices for rides in a community are located in county or city public transportation offices, senior centers, or offices of aging. See the following list of national and Florida contacts to begin to track down local services.

National Resources

1. ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation; an Easter Seals project) (800) 659-6428
www.projectaction.org
2. AlzOnline (866) 260-2466 www.AlzOnline.net
3. Alzheimer's Association (800) 272-3900 www.alz.org
4. ElderLocator (800) 677-1116 www.eldercare.gov
5. U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (888) 327-4236 www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Florida Resources: Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA)

1. Florida Elder Helpline (800) 963-5337
2. Florida DOEA (850) 414-2000

This ends Session 1: *Safe Driving*.

Further information about driving occurs in Session 2: *Safe Driving and Mild Cognitive Impairment* and in Session 3: *Safe Driving and Alzheimer's Disease or a Related Dementia (Memory Disorder)*.

Some Additional Resources

Alternative transportation: <http://www.eldercare.gov>

Association of Driver Rehabilitation Specialists: <http://www.aded.net>

CarFit: www.eldersafety.org/latest/roadmap-to-driving-wellness-and-car-fit-two-exciting-new-programs.html

Driver refresher courses: <http://www.aarp.org/drive>; www.aaapublicaffairs.com

DriveWell: <http://www.asaging.org/drivewell>

DriveAble (a Canadian program): <http://www.driveable.com>

Driving & Dementia Toolkit (published in Journal of the American Geriatric Society): <http://rgapottawa.com/dementia/english/default.asp>

Florida At-Risk Driver Council, Florida Senior Safety Resource Center. The Effects of Aging on Driving Ability. (February 2004). <http://www.hsmv.state.fl.us/ddl/atriskdriver.pdf> or www.fssrc.php.ufl.edu

GrandDriver information & references: <http://www.granddriver.info/>

Independence Drive: <http://driving.php.ufl.edu/index.php> (NODRTC website); <http://www.php.ufl.edu/ot/> (OT website); <http://www.IndependenceDrive.php.ufl.edu>

Older driver facts: <http://www.seniordrivers.org>; www.nhtsa.dot.gov; www.aoa.gov

Free Booklets

At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving. (2003). The Hartford. www.thehartford.com/alzheimers; Also: *We need to talk...*

Age Page. *Age Page on Older Drivers.* (Free Brochure). 1-800-222-2225
www.nia.nih.gov/health/agepages/drivers.htm.

Florida Transportation. Lifetime Choices. FL. Dept. of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles & FL Dept. of Elder Affairs. www.hsmv.state.fl.us or phone (850)487-0867

Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers (booklet).(9/03)
(AA34:02-520:15M7/03) (DOT HS 809 647) (ISBN:1-57947-558-2)
1. American Medical Association at www.ama.org or telephone (313) 464-4179.
2. U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at www.nhtsa.dot.gov or telephone (888) 327-4236.

Driving When You are Taking Medications. (Free Brochure DOT HS 809 777)
8/04

National Highway Traffic Safety, U.S. Dept. of Transportation. DOT Auto Safety Hotline: 1-888-327-4236. www.nhtsa.dot.gov)

Safe Driving for Older Adults. (Free Brochure DOT HS 809 493)
National Highway Traffic Safety, U.S. Dept. of Transportation. DOT Auto Safety Hotline: 1-888-327-4236. www.nhtsa.dot.gov