

Is it Time to Stop Driving?

My 72-year-old father was diagnosed with mild dementia recently. He is doing fairly well but my mother is concerned about his driving. She told me he turned down the wrong street when driving home one afternoon and seemed unclear on how to get himself in the right direction. We have been told that this can happen with dementia but don't quite know how to deal with the whole issue of driving. How will we know when it is time for him to stop?

It can be difficult to know exactly when it is time for a family member with dementia to give up driving. While the person with mild dementia may seem perfectly focused in normal conversation, they may be unable to pay attention to all of the details involved with driving. Sometimes, too, we overreact to common driving errors and immediately attribute them to the disease when, in fact, the person has had this bad driving pattern for a lifetime.

A single occurrence of poor driving or, as with your father, disorientation in a familiar place, usually is not cause to stop driving but more a red flag for increased monitoring. There are some warning signs to be on the alert for which may further indicate that your Dad is having problems behind the wheel:

- Incorrect signaling
 - Trouble navigating turns
 - Moving into a wrong lane
 - Confusion at exits
 - Parking inappropriately
 - Hitting curbs
 - Failing to notice traffic signs
 - Driving at inappropriate speeds
 - Delayed responses to unexpected situations
 - Increased agitation or irritation when driving
 - Scrapes or dents on the car, garage or mailbox
 - Getting lost in familiar places
 - Near misses
 - Ticketed moving violations or warnings
 - Car wrecks
 - Confusing the brake with the gas pedal
 - Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason
- (From the Hartford Financial Group Insurance Co. booklet: *At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia, and Driving.*)

Creating ongoing opportunities when you and/or other family members can observe your Dad while driving will help in determining when it is time to limit or discontinue this activity. For more helpful information on driving and dementia, particularly tips for *Easing the Transition From Driver to Passenger* and *Seeking Help From Outside Sources*, log on to <http://www.thehartford.com/alzheimers>.