

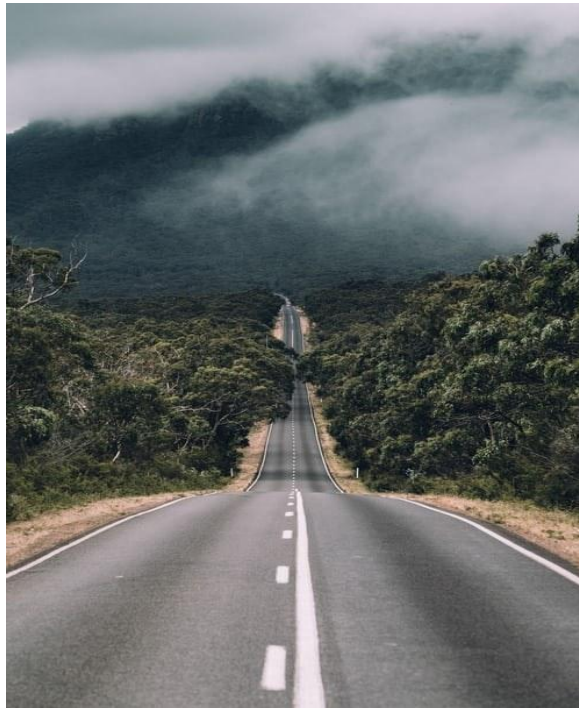


Family guide to helping drivers with cognitive impairment.

Topics to be Discussed

- *The aim of the guide*
 - *Understanding how cognitive impairment can affect driving*
 - *Step 1:- Legal Check List*
 - *Step 2:- Safety Check List*
 - *Step 3:- How to assess safety*
 - *Discussing retirement from driving with a loved one.*
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The Aim of the Guide



*This guide is aimed at guiding you through **the necessary steps** if you have safety concerns for a loved one's driving skills.*

***Increasing age** will naturally bring **gradual cognitive, physical and eyesight changes**. It is usually necessary to **compensate** for these by staying clear of the more complex road types and busy times of day.*

*However, **if a cognitive problem is present** other than that which can be expected from older age, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, the **risk of a collision can be much higher**. It is often the family who notice this first and need guidance on what to do.*



Useful information

1) The driver may be more **forgetful** than they used to be and repeat the same thing a number of times.

They may also become **easily confused**, or vague, about tasks they used to do easily.

2) For drivers with dementia, any shortcomings with their driving skills are, unfortunately, **liable to worsen over time**, and the risk of collision will increase.

If the driver seems to have **lost insight into the risk of causing serious injury or fatality** through poor driving decisions, it is likely that the time has come to retire from driving.

3) The key is to ensure a suitable balance is struck between your loved one's well being and their safety when driving, as well as the safety of all other road users.

The dangers associated with driving and dementia are not well documented due to the difficulty of any medical data about a driver in any crash scenario.

However, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that the middle to late stages of dementia can create a high risk scenario on the roads, and may be linked to many of the catastrophic headline grabbing collisions that give all older drivers a bad name.

Understanding how cognitive impairment may affect driving.



This guide will help you work through the steps needed in assessing whether a loved one is **still safe to drive**.

Certain signs in driving can be an early alert to a cognitive impairment.

The following are typical ways in which driving can be affected:

- **Multi-tasking problems** which show up on complex road layouts and in busy high streets or car parks.
 - **Visuospatial perception problems** which can show up in poor road positioning, reduced safety margins and parking problems.
 - **Problem solving difficulties** which can cause hesitation and uncertainty in an unexpected situation.
 - **Difficulty focusing on the driving task**, resulting in an intense stare ahead at the expense of rear awareness.
 - **Distracted easily** by external events not connected to driving.
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Step 1 -Legal Check List



1. Have DVLA been notified?

2. Have the insurance company been made aware?

3. Has the driver got the doctors support to keep driving?

4. Do they still hold a valid driving licence?

If you can answer yes to all of the above, and DVLA haven't told them to stop driving, proceed to step 2.

Have DVLA been notified?

It is a **legal requirement to notify DVLA** of any cognitive problems, even if no diagnosis has been made.

You should notify DVLA as soon as you are aware of the medical condition, or have any cognitive problems, rather than wait until your licence is due for renewal.

You can be fined up to £1,000 if you don't tell DVLA about a medical condition that affects your driving. **You may be prosecuted if you're involved in an accident as a result.**

Have you told the insurance company?

Most insurance companies will not change anything unless DVLA or a doctor has told you not to drive and you are found to be driving illegally.

*However, **it is always best to update them** on any diagnosis of this type to be on the safe side.*

Do you have your doctor's support?

If a medical professional has told you **not to drive**, you should not do so. Even though they have probably not seen you drive, fitness to drive is more of a **medical opinion** than a practical one.

The degree to which your driving may be affected by cognitive impairment can be predicted to a certain extent by medical investigations.

In certain instances, **driving against a doctor's advice can go against you** if an accident occurs, and your insurance company may not pay up fully.

Do you still hold a valid driving licence?

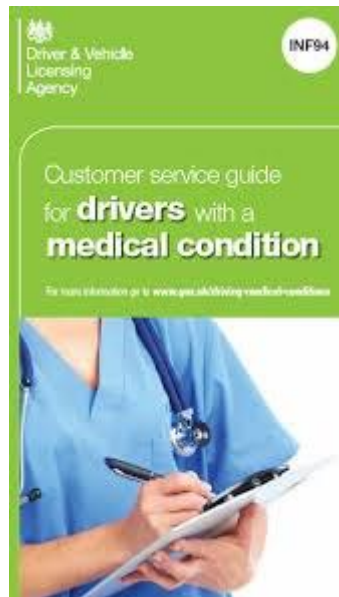
*When you notify DVLA of a cognitive impairment they normally start a **medical enquiry** which involves communicating with your doctor.*

*This can take many weeks but, in the meantime, you can carry on driving **unless they tell you not to and providing that you have your doctor's support.***

*You can also continue driving if your licence expires during this process, as long as DVLA have received your notification. This is covered under **Section 88 of the Road Traffic Act 1988** and normally applies unless a doctor has told you not to drive.*

INF188/6 Can I drive while my application is with DVLA

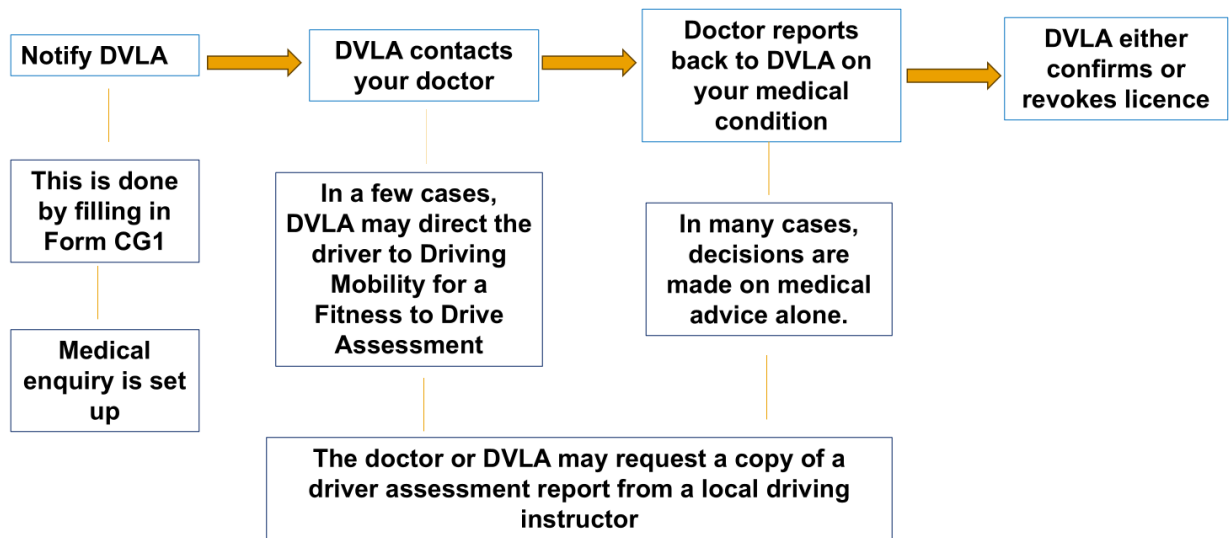
What happens next if a driver tells DVLA of a cognitive problem?



DVLA will start a medical enquiry which normally involves their own medical team and the driver's doctor communicating. It may also require a formal practical driving assessment at Driving Mobility in a small percentage of cases.

DVLA may also ask to see a copy of an informal driving assessment report from a local driving professional.

DVLA Medical Investigation



Step 2 - The Safety Checks

1. Are there recent changes in your loved one's driving?
2. Has there been recent damage to the car?
3. Have other people voiced concerns?
4. Has the driver become lost on a previous known route?
5. Can you relax as a passenger?
6. Does the driver appear to have a clear insight into the risks of driving?

If you answer yes to some of these questions, there is likely to be a problem which you will **need to follow up** to avoid your loved one getting into a collision.

This may be just persuading them to **restrict the roads they drive on** and the times of day that they drive.

It is sensible for anyone with cognitive impairment to keep to the more local and familiar road layouts, but if you are still worried you can do the following:

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- Ensure DVLA are aware of the medical condition as this will start a medical enquiry into legal fitness to drive. *(See note below)* However this process can take many weeks.
 - Preferably, persuade them to take a driving assessment with a knowledgeable and appropriately experienced professional.
 - If you consider the danger is obvious and immediate, you may have to go as far as taking the keys away.
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Note: You can make a third party notification to DVLA if you have concerns about someone's driving.

Further Guidance on safety checks

1) Has the driver become lost on a previously known route?

Being unsure about a route that used to be familiar is not necessarily a safety issue but what happens next could be.

Becoming lost and confused about which road to take can be a safety issue, as well as a worry for their loved ones. The possible stress of getting confused about the route can lead to unsafe driving practices.

It can also become extremely dangerous if the driver finds themselves on a complex and high-speed road layout that they would normally avoid.

2) Are there recent changes in driving?

As we grow older there will naturally be age related changes in the way we drive. This is because our eyesight weakens, we get more frail physically, and it takes longer to process information.

However, these changes are naturally very gradual which makes them difficult to notice on a day-to-day basis.

If you believe that the driver has become less safe recently and these changes seem to be happening more quickly, this could be due to a cognitive problem.

3) Has there been recent damage to the car?

Frequent scratches or scrapes to the car could be due to an eyesight issue, particularly if they occurred in the dark or low sun.

However, they may also be due to a reduction in spatial perception and multi-tasking difficulties which are two of the possible changes due to a cognitive problem.

The quickest way to check this out is to sit as a passenger and assess whether adequate safety margins are being left.

4) Have other people voiced concerns?

A sign that safety has changed is when a neighbour, friend or other third party has expressed concerns.

This can often result from the person seeing the driver having difficulties in a car park or in another situation which requires manoeuvring the car in a restricted space.

It can also result from the driver being seen as overly hesitant or driving too slowly.

These concerns should be listened to and, where possible, more details obtained for future reference.

Assessing whether the driver is safe to drive



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- 1. Sit in the car as a passenger and make a note of anything you feel uncomfortable with.**

If you know what to look for, you can normally tell if cognitive problems are affecting driving. We can help you with this if you complete the questionnaire on this link and submit it to us.

<https://forms.office.com/r/1CukxJhfLZ>

What do I look out for as a passenger in a car when the driver has a cognitive impairment?

1) Can you relax as a passenger?

If you can't sit back and relax as a passenger it means you don't fully trust the driver to stay out of trouble.

This is probably due to reduced safety margins or inappropriate speed which may be just a poor driving habit.

However, if this is a change in their driving it is likely to be due to a cognitive problem.

2) Assessing Multi-tasking or task switching skills

Being able to multi switch between different tasks quickly is extremely important for safe driving.

On a busy roundabout, for example, the driver needs to be able to switch quickly between route planning, steering, indicating and awareness of dangers from the sides. The normal thing to suffer here is good lane discipline and satisfactory use of the mirrors.

In busy car parks the driver may seem overwhelmed when choosing a suitable parking space whilst looking out for pedestrians, reversing vehicles and other hazards.

3) Spatial Awareness

A common theme for those who have cognitive problems is a lack of good spatial perception.

They often drive too close to the centre line and cut corners. They may also drive too close to obstacles and pass cyclists too closely.

It may cause problems with using a car park efficiently when they try to manoeuvre in a far more restricted space than the space which is available to them.

4) Focus on the driving task.

The more difficult a driver finds the driving task, the more they have to focus on the main things to keep them safe, such as steering and problems ahead.

This manifests itself with the driver having to really focus on the immediate road ahead at the expense of an all round awareness, and you are likely to notice the driver with a fixed forward stare, with little head or eye movements.

A safe driver will quite easily be able to deal with the problems ahead as well as be aware of other road users to the sides and to the rear. However, this requires head and eye movements to scan for information, even if done on a sub conscious level.

5) Prolonged concentration and distractions

You may find that the driver is safe for a period of time but, after a while, seems to lose focus on what part of the journey they are on. This can be noticeable if, for example, the speed suddenly drops unnecessarily on a safe road that has a higher speed limit.

You may also find that the driver takes an interest in an external feature that jogs their memory about something they did in the past, such as a house their friend used to live in.

Being distracted for more than a second or so can potentially lead to collision.

6) Emerging from a junction

If a driver is waiting to turn right across two lanes of traffic from a side road onto a main road, good multi-tasking skills are essential to be able to turn out of the junction whilst also updating any change to safety from other road users.

Someone who has problems with multi-tasking will often only make the initial safety observations before moving across the junction and not whilst steering across the junction, meaning they are vulnerable to a collision if the situation develops such as when a vehicle appears from just out of initial sight.

7) Does the driver retain good insight into how dangerous driving can be?

Often, drivers in the early stages of dementia recognise all the potential problems that driving can cause and are very sensible about restricting themselves to roads they feel safe on.

As the condition progresses, you may find that the driver has more of a casual approach and doesn't want to engage in a conversation about whether they are safe or not. They may have lost that vital insight of the danger they pose to themselves and others.

This can often happen in the middle to later stages of dementia and is a strong pointer to retirement from driving.

Having a conversation about driving



Early and Open Communication

Don't begin a conversation by saying they are unsafe.

Start the conversation as soon as you notice changes to their driving and take in their view on any concerns they may have.

Agree about modifications to where they drive and when they drive to avoid the more difficult challenges.

Stay On Message

Be empathetic of the importance they attach to driving as a means of independence but continue with the same message of the need for eventual driver retirement as a natural outcome.

Emotional Support

Providing emotional support can help the driver feel understood and valued during the retirement process. Help them with getting used to alternative means to maintain independence such as using the bus, taxi or arranging for home delivery of groceries.

Summary



As a rule of thumb, if a passenger can happily relax in the car on a variety of road types, there is probably little to worry about.

However, bear in mind that the more complex road layouts and higher speed roads can become more challenging as age goes on due to normal age-related changes. Ageing slows down the rate at which information can be processed.

It is sensible for anyone with cognitive impairment to keep to the more local and familiar road layouts but if you are worried you can do the following:

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1. Ensure DVLA are aware of the medical condition as this will start a medical enquiry into legal fitness to drive. However this process can take many weeks.
 2. If you consider the danger is obvious and immediate, you may have to go as far as taking the keys away.
 3. Preferably, persuade them to take a driving assessment with a knowledgeable and appropriately experienced professional.
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DriveTalk Consultants are happy to discuss your own situation in confidence.

Further support

If you need further support that is aligned to your precise situation, please contact us at DriveTalk Consultants.

We can point you in the right direction by drawing on our many years of experience interacting with hundreds of drivers in a similar situation. **Just go to the website and send us** a message.

www.driving-and-dementia.com
