



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
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# Keeping on the go: Driving safely as you age



## Meet Jean-Louis...

Jean-Louis is 75 years old and has recently been diagnosed with dementia. Jean-Louis is the main driver for himself and his wife. He is now wondering:

### Should I continue driving?

A diagnosis of dementia does not automatically mean that you can not drive. However, at some point in time, the effects of dementia may make it unsafe for you to drive.

The information in this brochure is intended for educational purpose only. It does not and should not replace the advice or treatment from a health care professional. Never disregard professional health care advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this brochure.



## How might dementia affect safe driving?

The effects of dementia are different for each person. Some of the effects of this disease may interfere with your ability to drive. For example:

- **Memory:** You may have difficulty remembering things and familiar places.
- **Decision making:** You may find it more difficult to make decisions.
- **Attention:** You may have difficulty doing more than one thing at a time or you may be easily distracted.
- **Reaction time:** You may find it difficult to react quickly in stressful situations.
- **Judgement:** You may not recognize when you can no longer do tasks safely.
- **Impulsiveness:** You may act quickly without always thinking about your actions.



## Warning signs of unsafe driving

- You lose your way.
- You have less confidence in your driving skills.
- You notice other drivers honk at you.
- You miss stop signs or traffic lights.
- You mix up the gas and brake pedals.
- You have problems with lane changes or merging.
- You have minor accidents or traffic tickets.
- Your passenger needs to help you.
- Family and friends refuse to get in the car with you.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to make some changes to your driving strategies and have your driving evaluated.



## Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in risky driving situations. Here are some strategies that can be used to reduce the risk:

### Strategies to reduce the effects of dementia on driving

- Have regular medical checkups and ask your medical doctor about your ability to drive.
- Have a formal driving assessment.
- Recognize what is stressful for you while driving (e.g. busy traffic).
- Plan your trips so that you avoid stressful situations when possible.
- Limit distractions when you drive (e.g. turn off the radio).

Driving and dementia

Canada







## For more information

**Alzheimer Society of Canada:**  
[www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)

**Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists:** [www.aded.net](http://www.aded.net)

**Canada's Road Safety Strategy 2015:**  
[www.crss-2015.ccmta.ca](http://www.crss-2015.ccmta.ca)

**Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists:** [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)  
[www.olderdriversafety.ca](http://www.olderdriversafety.ca)

**Canadian Automobile Association:**  
[www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca)



Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the *National Blueprint for Injury Prevention in Older Drivers* outlines a vision and directions for action for promoting safe driving among older drivers in Canada.

*Canada's Road Safety Strategy 2015* outlines a framework of best practices to address major road safety challenges.

PHAC wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists in the production of this brochure.

Également disponible en français sous le titre :  
*Restez sur la bonne voie : Conduisez prudemment tout en prenant de l'âge — La maladie d'Alzheimer et la conduite automobile*

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## General strategies

- Choose a vehicle that is easy to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats.
- Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition.
- Make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirrors are properly adjusted.
- Limit driving at night, in bad weather, during rush hour or on limited access highways.
- Be careful when changing lanes, making left-hand turns or merging into traffic.
- Maintain a safe following distance.
- Take breaks if you are driving a long distance.
- Have regular medical checkups.
- Make sure you know how your medications might affect your ability to drive safely.



## Strategies for family

When a person is unable to recognize or admit that his or her driving abilities are no longer safe, as family members and care-givers, you often have to take the issue into your hands. This can be a difficult task and you should prepare yourself ahead of time.

- Start the discussion when everyone is relaxed and there is enough time to talk.
- Observe your family member while he or she is driving.
- Keep a written record of unsafe driving behaviours over time.
- Don't leave your family member feeling abandoned.
- Offer alternatives and support.
- Be prepared to take the keys if necessary.

You can also seek support and information from others, including family members, medical doctors, occupational therapists, certified driver rehabilitation specialists.

- An occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate driving ability, develop programs to improve safe driving habits or help find alternative transportation.
- A driver information session or refresher course may be useful.



## Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel that you are safe to drive or you have been told that you can no longer drive. Before that time comes, make a personal transportation plan. Planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving. Here are some strategies to help:

- Become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options.
- Collect information on local transportation options.
- Check the Internet or contact your municipal government to learn more about transportation services in your area.

**Remember:** Don't hesitate to ask for help from family, friends or neighbours.



## Jean-Louis' decision

Jean-Louis understands that he will have to give up driving eventually, but until then, he and his wife are going to monitor his driving ability and will discuss this with his medical doctor. He and his occupational therapist are also making a plan together for alternative transportation.

## What strategies will you use?

