



# KEEPING ON THE GO

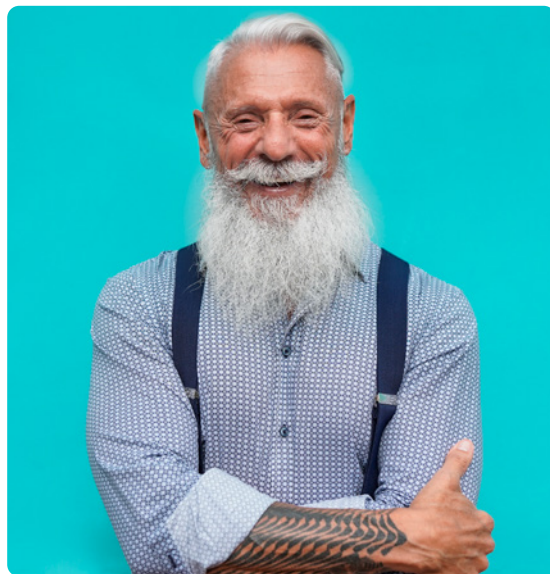
Driving safely as you age



## Driving and dementia



## 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 cannot drive. However, it is important to regularly consider your health and consult with a health professional as needed if there are any changes that may affect your ability to drive.*

### How might dementia affect safe driving?

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

- > **Memory:** You may have difficulty remembering routes, traffic rules and familiar places.
- > **Decision making:** You may find it more difficult to make decisions while driving.
- > **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 the impact of your actions.

### Warning signs of unsafe driving

- > You lose your sense of direction.
- > You have less confidence in your driving skills.
- > You become upset, frustrated or confused in response to certain situations while driving.
- > You notice other drivers honk at you.
- > You notice changes with your spatial awareness, such as missing stop signs, speed limits, or traffic lights.
- > You mix up the gas and brake pedals or have difficulty shifting gears.
- > You have problems with lane changes or merging.
- > You have minor accidents or traffic tickets.
- > Your passenger needs to support you, perhaps with navigating or possibly taking over driving.
- > Family and friends refuse to get in the car with you.

If any of these warning signs reflect your situation, it may be time to make some changes to your driving strategies and have your driving evaluated.

### Safe driving strategies

All drivers, regardless of their age or health, may 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 health checkups and ask your health provider about your ability to drive. This is important for your own safety as well as others on the road.
- > Have a formal driving assessment. Some jurisdictions require older adults over 80 years of age to go through several steps to renew their license. Find out the requirements for your province or territory.
- > Recognize what is stressful for you while driving (e.g. busy traffic, road speeds, construction).
- > Plan your trips so that you avoid stressful situations when possible.
- > Limit distractions when you drive (e.g. turn off the radio).



## 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  
<https://roadsafetystrategy.ca/en/strategy>

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

Canadian Association of Occupational  
Therapists – CarFit Program  
<https://caot.ca/site/prac-res/carfit>

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

### General strategies

- › Choose a vehicle that is easy to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options.
- › Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition.
- › Make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirrors are properly adjusted.
- › Limit driving at times you feel less confident. This could be at night, in bad weather, during rush hour, on highways or isolated roads.
- › Be careful when changing lanes, making left-hand turns or merging into traffic.
- › Maintain a safe following distance.
- › Take breaks every few hours if you are driving a long distance.
- › Choose a parking lot or space where it is easier to park.
- › Have regular health checkups.
- › Make sure you know how your medications or other health conditions might affect your ability to drive safely.

**Remember:** Don't hesitate to ask for help from someone you trust – family, friends or health providers. It is important to explain your needs so that they can understand the impact of this change on your life and support you.

### Strategies for family members and friends

When a person is unable to recognize or accept that their driving abilities are no longer safe, as a family member, friend or caregiver, you may have to take action. This can be difficult and you should prepare yourself ahead of time.

- › Observe your family member or friend while they are driving.
- › Keep a written record of unsafe driving behaviours over time.
- › Start the discussion when everyone is relaxed and there is enough time to talk.
- › Offer alternatives and support. Take time to understand how this change to daily living can impact the person living with dementia and others, and how they may be feeling about this change.
- › A driver information session or refresher course may be useful and a good first step.
- › An occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate driving ability, develop programs to improve safe driving habits or help find alternate transportation.
- › Support your family member or friend to manage feelings of anxiety about isolation or loss of independence.
- › Be prepared to take the keys or disconnect the car battery cable if necessary.

### Driving retirement for a person living with dementia

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. In being proactive, this can support continued community involvement and social connectedness. Here are some strategies to help:

- › Become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options in your community.
- › Check the Internet or contact your municipal government to learn more about transportation services in your area.
- › Ask your health provider about accessible transportation options and ways to remain engaged in your community while living with dementia.

Being unable to drive is a major life change for many people and it is understandable that you may experience many different emotions. After receiving a diagnosis of dementia, it may feel overwhelming or stressful to think about how this will impact your life, particularly your ability to drive in the future. It is important that you give yourself the space and time to acknowledge your emotions.

## Jean-Louis' decision

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

### *What strategies will you use?*



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

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

Également disponible en français sous le titre :  
*Rester en mouvement : Conduire en toute sécurité en vieillissant - Conduire et la démence*

Public Health Agency of Canada  
[www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)  
Toll-Free: 1 800 0-Canada (1-800-622-6232)  
TTY: 1-800-926-9105

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Health, 2024

Cat.: HP25-14/4-2025E-PDF / HP25-14/4-2025E (Print)  
ISBN: 978-0-660-78504-2 (PDF) / 978-0-660-78505-9 (Print)  
Pub.: 250188