

Memory Problems and Driving[©]

Introduction

Driving is an everyday activity that many of us do not think about. For most it is a necessity and it allows us to be independent and social. As we get older, for many of us, health conditions may affect our ability to drive, for example, failing eyesight. If this is bad enough, our driving might be unsafe and it may be illegal for us to continue to drive.

Can memory problems affect my ability to drive?

Driving can feel like an automatic process, especially if you are an experienced driver. However, it is a complicated procedure that requires manual skills, concentration, decision making and co-ordination. Memory loss can affect these skills, and you may find that your reactions are slowed, or that you may struggle with spatial tasks, such as parking. Although memory problems may not exclude you from driving, it is important to consider how safe your driving may be.

If you wish to continue driving

If you have mild memory problems, and wish to continue to drive, you may be able to do so. However, the law currently states that you must inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) of your diagnosis. This is also the case for any new or worsening medical condition which may affect driving ability.

This does not mean that you inevitably have to stop driving, but it is important that you do inform them, as if you do not it is a criminal offence with a fine of up to £1000. It is also important to let your insurance company know that you have memory problems, as it could affect any claims you may need to make in the future.

To notify the DVLA you can fill in the form on the back of your driving licence, or download and complete form CG1 (available from www.direct.gov/uk). Alternatively you could write a letter to (include your licence number, name and date of birth) to:

Drivers Medical Group

DVLA

Swansea

SA99 1TU

[How long can I continue to drive?](#)

It can be difficult to know when the right time is to stop driving, and this is different for everyone. However there are some signs that may indicate that your driving is no longer safe:

- Slowed reactions to other road users
- Struggling to make sense of road signs/lane markings
- Bumps or scratches on your car
- 'Near-misses' at junctions or when changing lanes
- Becoming lost on familiar journeys
- Family members inform you that they are concerned
- Family members may avoid going in the car with you

If you notice any of these signs, it may be time to think about giving up driving. If you are unsure, you could attend a Mobility Centre for a formal Driving Assessment. This is not a driving test - however, all aspects of your driving performance will be assessed including medical fitness, vision, speed of reactions and decision-making, as well as your physical ability to operate the controls. An in car assessment is also carried out on a driving track, and when appropriate, public roads. The evaluation of your driving ability is based on detailed evidence of this comprehensive assessment. Mobility Centre staff are very experienced, and do their utmost to support you and put you at ease. For further information please see the North East Drive Mobility leaflet.

It is important to know that it is the DVLA who will make the decision on whether you are safe to continue driving.

Reducing your risk when driving

While you continue to drive, there are a number of things you can do to reduce any risks:

- Drive shorter distances
- Stick to familiar roads/routes
- Try not to drive during rush hours
- Try to drive during the day, and not at night
- Try not to drive long journeys, if you do, plan breaks or share the driving
- Try not to drive in poor weather conditions

- Try not to drive if you are feeling tired or unwell
- Ask someone to accompany you on your journey
- **Check that any medications you are taking e.g. sleeping tablets or some medications for anxiety, do not interfere with your driving ability.** If you are unsure about any medications you may take, please consult your doctor.

The decision to stop driving

We get used to using our cars all the time. It can be a very difficult decision to give up driving, and it can be a significant event that can impact on how you feel. If you wish to speak to someone about this you can contact:

- Your GP
- The Alzheimer's Society
- Local mental health services

There are many alternatives to driving, which you can discuss with your doctor. These include:

- Using public transport e.g. bus or metro services
- Using local taxi services
- Finding out about the local community bus service
- Finding out about local 'hitch and ride' bus services
- Asking friends or family for a lift
- For hospital appointments, using your local NHS transport service
- Using the internet for shopping and having it delivered
- Paying bills on-line or setting up direct debits

- Joining organised trips or excursions

Giving up driving can be a difficult decision; however, there are some benefits. These include:

- Saving money on petrol, car tax and insurance.
- Less stress, no longer having to navigate through heavy traffic, or find your way
- You will no longer need to remember routes
- No longer having to find car parking spaces in busy places
- There can be health benefits – e.g. if you walk more often you will benefit from the extra exercise

When you decide to stop driving

If you do decide to stop driving, you will need to inform:

- The DVLA, you can do this in writing at:
 - DVLA
Swansea
SA99 1DL
- Your insurance company
- Your doctor

If you need help with this, you can discuss it with your doctor, or someone from the Alzheimer's Society.

Where to get more information on alternative transport:

For information on concessionary travel passes:

Tel: 0191 278 8100 or online at
www.newcastle.gov.uk/care-and-wellbeing

For information on local Metro services:

Tel: 0191 20 20 747 or online at
www.nexus.org.uk

For local bus/train/ferry information:

Traveline: 0871 200 2233 or go online for timetables and journey planners at **www.travelinenortheast.info**

For help planning a journey, and more, go online to:

www.transportdirect.info

For information on the **Newcastle City Council Minibus Service:**

Tel: 0191 265 9267 or for details of other local community transport services, go online to:
www.communitytransport.org

Further Information:

DVLA

Swansea

SA99 1DL

www.dvla.gov.uk

North East Drive Mobility

Walkergate Park

Centre for Neuro Rehabilitation & Neuro Psychiatry

Benfield Road

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE6 4QD

Tel: 0191 2875090

Email: northeast.drivemobility@ntw.nhs.uk

Website: www.ntw.nhs.uk/mobility

Alzheimer's Society

Devon House

58 St Katharine's Way

London

E1W 1JX

Helpline: 0845 300 0336 (Monday – Friday 8.30am – 6.30pm)

www.alzheimers.org.uk