

Driving Dilemma

Individuals with Alzheimer's disease or a related disease (ARD) often demonstrate deficiencies in judgment and performance behind the wheel.

Caregivers should look for these signs which might indicate a person with ARD should no longer drive or should be evaluated by a professional:

- Forgetting how to get to familiar places
- Not following traffic signs
- Incorrect signaling
- Moving into the wrong lane
- Confusion at exits or intersections
- Stopping in traffic for no reason
- Showing poor judgment of distance (turns too wide or too tight, running over curbs).
- Forgetting how to get to familiar places
- Not yielding right-of-way
- Slow reaction time
- Driving at speeds not right for conditions
- Becoming easily confused or angry while driving

Continued driving once these warning signs exist can pose dangers to the individual as well as to others on the road. Families are often reluctant to stop the person with ARD from driving for a variety of reasons such as:

- A. The person with ARD will resist
- B. Fear the person with ARD will experience a decrease in self-esteem from the loss of mobility and independence
- C. The spouse depends on the person with ARD to do the driving

Sometimes, a person with ARD can still drive because their travels follow a routine, such as driving to work every day or to the same grocery store, bank, etc. However, when something unexpected happens, such as a construction detour or a snowstorm, the person's inability to cope may become evident. Many people with ARD do not give up driving until they are involved in an accident. This "dilemma" needs to be continuously monitored.

The responsibility for curtailing an individual with ARD's driving usually falls to the caregiver. It's a difficult time for everyone. The person with ARD may become angry. The caregiver may be saddened and guilty by the fact that yet another thing has been taken away from their loved one.

Here are some suggestions if you meet resistance when "taking away the keys":

- Have the family physician write a letter or "prescription" stating the individual can no longer drive. Having a letter allows the family to refer to it as often as necessary.
- Move the car to another location out of sight. You can say the car is in the shop.
- Disable the car by removing the distributor cap or some other part or file down the individual's car key so it will no longer work.
- **In Anchorage, contact Providence Outpatient & Rehabilitation at: #212-6300 to schedule a driving assessment.**

***Note:** In Alaska, the DMV will consider canceling a person's driver's license if there is written testimony from a physician or member of the general public stating the specific problem and/or danger to the public. The testimony is kept confidential. Examinations may be required before a determination is made. Police, responding to the scene of an accident, may also report cases of confused, disoriented or irrational drivers, which in turn may be investigated by the DMV.

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