

GUIDE · 8 MIN READ

# Driving and dementia: when to stop, and how to have the conversation

It is one of the hardest conversations in dementia care. It is also one of the most important — for them, for you, and for everyone else on the road. Here is how families handle it well.

## Warning signs it's time

- Getting lost on familiar routes — even once is enough to take seriously.
- Slow reactions: late braking, hesitation at junctions, struggling with roundabouts or four-way stops.
- Drifting in lane, riding the kerb, missing exits.
- New dents and scrapes on the car they can't explain.
- Confusing the pedals, or stalling repeatedly.
- Anxiety or anger about driving they didn't have before — they often know before they can say it.
- Other drivers honking at them more often.
- Family passengers refusing to be driven.

## How to have the conversation

- Plan it together with another family member or the GP / PCP — not alone. A united front is kinder than weeks of repeated arguments.
- Frame it as 'the doctor said' or 'the diagnosis says' rather than 'I think'. Removes the personal sting.

- Acknowledge what driving means — independence, identity, the shopping run, visiting friends. Don't pretend it's a small loss.
- Offer the replacement before you remove the keys: a taxi account, a weekly lift from a grandchild, a Saturday outing.
- If they refuse to stop, you have options below — but try the conversation route first, with the doctor's backing.
- Don't argue when they're tired, late in the day, or after a difficult appointment.

## **The law in the UK**

- It is a legal requirement to tell the DVLA about a dementia diagnosis. The person with dementia must do it (or you, with their consent or as their attorney). Failing to is a £1,000 fine and can invalidate insurance.
- The DVLA decides — not the GP. They may issue a 1, 2 or 3-year licence, request a driving assessment, or revoke the licence.
- A driving assessment at a Mobility Centre ([rdac.co.uk](http://rdac.co.uk)) is the calmest route: an independent specialist, not a family argument.
- Insurance must also be told. Driving without disclosure invalidates the policy and can leave the family liable.

## **The law in the US**

- Reporting rules vary by state. California, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Delaware, Nevada, and New Jersey require doctors to report dementia diagnoses to the DMV. Most other states allow but don't require it.
- Any family member can typically submit a confidential 'unsafe driver' report to their state DMV — it will trigger a re-test, not an automatic suspension.
- AAA's 'Roadwise Driver' or a CDRS (Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist) on-road assessment is gold-standard, often covered partially by Medicare with a doctor's order.
- Insurance must be told if a diagnosis is on record. Driving without disclosure can invalidate the policy.

## **If they refuse to stop**

- Ask the GP / PCP to put it in writing. Many people accept from a doctor what they won't from family.

- Disable or remove the car — sell it, lend it to a grandchild, or simply move it out of sight. 'The car's in for repair' for two weeks often works when the conversation hasn't.
- Hide the keys. Crude, but used by many families.
- Take the legal route — DVLA report (UK) or state DMV confidential report (US). Both can be done by family without the driver knowing it was you.

## Log the worrying moments

The Care Companion's daily log captures the small driving incidents most families forget by the next appointment — the evidence the doctor needs to back you up. 7-day free trial.

[Start free trial](#)

---

General guidance for family carers. Reporting requirements and law change — check the DVLA (UK) or your state DMV (US). If a person is an immediate danger on the road, call 999 / 911.

---

Free guide from The Care Companion — practical tools for families caring for someone with dementia. More guides at [thecarecompanion.com/guides](https://thecarecompanion.com/guides)