



Driving Issues

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The thought of not being able to drive can be an extremely emotional decision for HD families. It often means loss of independence or freedom to the person with HD which can trigger feelings of depression, isolation and anger. It will likely cause disruption to the family routine as well as emotional stress to both the person with HD and family members. It is likely that all HD persons will have to stop driving for their safety and the safety of others.

The deterioration in concentration, processing information, executive functioning, decision-making, and slower muscle response, all effect the HD person's ability to drive safely. Persons with HD may or may not be able to recognize their limitations due to unawareness (anosognosia) in HD. Therefore, family and friends may be the first to recognize issues/concerns in driving and this may come as shock to HD person and may be met with resistance.

Strategies to address Driving Concerns

- Discuss driving issues/concerns early and frequently
- Encourage HD persons to utilize strategies to increase focus and safety while driving
- Periodically evaluate driver safety
- Utilize strategies for resistant and uncooperative persons
- Utilize community resources

Early and Frequent Discussions

- For most HD persons giving up car keys is a gradual process. Knowing what to expect and preparing can make the process less painful for the HD person and the family. It is important that when talking to someone about driving issues or concerns that you are respectful in remembering driving often means independence and the thought of not driving can trigger some people to feel defensive and like they are losing a piece of their freedom. Avoid alienating or calling them bad or dangerous drivers as that may cause

additional conflict. Planning early with the entire family in a cooperative and supportive manner can often lead to less conflict when the day comes for the HD person to stop driving.

Early in the disease process the family should discuss:

- A plan about how to approach issues/concerns in regards to safety.
 - How will family let the person know they have concerns
 - Who in the family will be discussing the issues and safety concerns
 - Explore community resources and/or medical professionals that can assist with safety conversations when needed
 - How and who will help the person with transportation once they stop driving

Strategies to Increase Driving Safety

- Avoid/eliminate distractions in the car
 - Turn off radio
 - Limit conversations in car
- Drive during low traffic times
- Drive during day light hours
- Avoid freeways
- Slowly reduce how far the person drives
 - staying around town and on familiar roads
- Carry “I Have HD” Wallet card in car to show police if pulled over to avoid misunderstandings about the persons condition

Evaluating Driving Skills

Periodically evaluating the HD persons driving skills may be helpful in identifying issues early and implementing driver safety strategies and/or stopping driving before any incidents/accidents occur. Some questions to ask when evaluating driving skills include:

- Does the driver have difficulties merging on/off freeways?
- Does the driver forget things?
 - To buckle up, turn on headlights, adjust mirrors, etc.
- Does the driver have troubles working the pedals?
 - Troubles moving from accelerator to brake, etc.
- When merging or changing lanes does the driver rely on the mirrors, rather than also turning their head to check blind spots?
- Does the driver have trouble seeing other vehicles, bicyclists or pedestrians, especially at night?
- Does the driver seem to miss/ignore stop signs or traffic lights?
- How quickly can the driver react to sudden changes in traffic patterns or sirens/flashing lights?
- Does the driver change, weave or drift into other lanes without signaling?
- Do other drivers honk or pass frequently even when traffic is moving relatively slowly?

- Does the driver forget where he/she is going?
- Has the driver been issued any traffic tickets, traffic stops/warnings or had any incidents (accidents, near accidents, fender benders, etc) in the last 2 years?

Strategies for Families when HD Persons are resistant and/or uncooperative in stopping driving

- It may be more helpful to have persons outside the family discuss driving with the HD person
- Utilize community resources for official behind the wheel driving evaluations, etc
- Report any unsafe driving to Department of Motor Vehicles or Police,
 - Anybody (family, friends, neighbors, medical professionals) can report safety issues as appropriate.
- In severe situations, family members may need to hide the car keys or disable the car to prevent the HD person from driving
 - i.e. remove the battery, take the keys out of the persons home, etc.

Community or Internet Resources

- Utilize an objective person to evaluate and discuss driving concerns as appropriate
 - Doctor, nurse, social worker, church members, neighbors, friends, etc.
- Participate in behind the wheel driving evaluation of skills and safety periodically.
 - This can be completed by private company or local Department of Motor Vehicles
- AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety -- www.aaafoundation.org/electronic-only-brochures
- Helpguide.org -- www.helpguide.org/elder/senior_citizen_driving.htm
- California Department of Motor Vehicles <http://dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv>
- Caring.com -- www.caring.com/articles/when-should-seniors-stop-driving

Revised Feb 2016

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