Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

Driving Safety

Good drivers are alert, think clearly, and make good decisions. When a person with Alzheimer's disease is not able to do these things, he or she should stop driving. But, he or she may not want to stop driving or even think there is a problem.

As the caregiver, you will need to talk with the person about the need to stop driving. Do this in a caring way. Understand how unhappy the person may be to admit that he or she has reached this new stage.

Safety First

A person with some memory loss may be able to drive safely sometimes. But, he or she may not be able to react quickly when faced with a surprise on the road. Someone could get hurt or killed. If the person's reaction time slows, you need to stop the person from driving.

Here are some other things to know about driving and memory loss:

- The person may be able to drive short distances on local streets during the day but may not be able to drive safely at night or on a freeway. If this is the case, then limit the times and places the person can drive.
- Some people with memory problems decide on their own not to drive, while others may deny they have a problem.

Signs that the person should stop driving include new dents and scratches on the car. You may also notice that the person takes a long time to do a simple errand and cannot explain why, which may indicate that he or she got lost.

When Driving Becomes Unsafe

Here are some ways to stop people with Alzheimer's disease from driving:

- Try talking about your concerns with the person.
- Take him or her to get a driving test.

- Ask your doctor to tell him or her to stop driving. The doctor can write, "Do not drive" on a prescription pad, and you can show this to the person.
- Hide the car keys, move the car, take out the distributor cap, or disconnect the battery.

There are other ways to get around:

- Ask family or friends to drive the person.
- Find out about services that help people with disabilities get around their community. These services may include free or low-cost buses, taxi service, and carpools. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging or call the Community Transportation Association at 1-800-527-8279.

For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": *www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease*
- **Visit** *www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving*
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

If the person with Alzheimer's disease won't stop driving, ask your state Department of Motor Vehicles about a medical review. The person may be asked to retake a driving test. In some cases, the person's license could be taken away.

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

July 2012