



I have never had a ticket in my life: How to handle driving

As dementia progresses, many families will face the challenging task of addressing concerns over a loved one's driving abilities. This can be one of the most difficult conversations that families face since the loss of driving privileges can result in a sense of isolation and loss of autonomy for the person. At the same time, it can increase the demand and stress on family caregivers. The loss of memory, insight and judgment can further complicate the discussion as the person may no longer fully comprehend why driving is no longer possible.

Driving engages nearly all regions of your brain. As dementia attacks the brain, it begins to damage areas that are necessary for safe driving. It also affects the connections between different regions of the brain. These progressive brain changes vary amongst individuals, but eventually all people with dementia will become unsafe to drive. Thinking abilities also become impaired in dementia, and in turn, result in the following difficulties on the road:

- **Memory:** Unable to recall directions and/or street signs with poor recall of past experiences.

- **Visuospatial:** Not judging distances that can result in driving too close or far from other vehicles. Not recognizing changes in environment including familiar landmarks used for navigation.
- **Coordination:** Unable to prioritize information needed for safe driving. Not able to multitask during more complex tasks such as talking and changing lanes, following verbal directions, etc.
- **Judgment/ Insight:** No longer anticipates likely scenarios, analyzes options or responds to changing conditions on the road as in the past.
- **Emotion:** Lacks appropriate emotional response to stressors on the road resulting in frustration, anger, anxiety, etc.

So how does one know if their loved one is beginning to have trouble driving? Signs that driving has become more difficult may include:

- Begins to modify or limit their driving (e.g. only to familiar places; not driving at night)

- Requires a co-pilot to navigate
- Avoids highways or busy streets
- Becomes anxious or angry on the road
- Trips to destinations take longer than expected
- Unexplained dings or scratches on the car
- Traffic citations
- Not signaling when changing lanes
- Not obeying signs or traffic lights
- Increased hesitation or decreased speed while driving
- You feel uncomfortable driving with them

Prevention is key! Even if your person is not yet beginning to display these signs, you will still want to observe their driving regularly in order to catch problems early. Drive with your person at least once every 2 weeks. Observe them driving in conditions that require divided attention (e.g. parking lots, highways). If concerns arise, do a formal driving evaluation on a yearly basis through the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) or a professional driving assessment service.

When you receive the diagnosis of dementia, start planning early for the inevitable loss. In the early stages, involve your person in the planning process. Set up an "agreement with my family about driving." This means that your person should elect a designee they trust to tell them when it is time to stop driving. This will require that this designee drive along with your person at least every 3 – 6 months. Since we've all seen "Silver Alerts" in our community noting that a person with dementia is lost while driving, your designee will be relieved to know that they are doing their part in keeping the person safe.

Begin to discuss alternative modes of transportation (e.g. friends/ family, taxis, senior transportation) so that the person can stay independent and involved in familiar and fulfilling activities for as long as possible. Since family and friends are often the first people we ask when in need of a ride, here are some things to consider:

- Sit down with your family and discuss the needs you have for transportation.
- Identify a list of family and friends who are willing to meet some/all of your transportation needs.
- Ask your family and friends if/when they are willing to transport you.
- Be specific with them about what you need and when you need it – don't assume that they know!

There are some volunteer organizations that provide limited transportation for medical appointments and grocery shopping. Taxi service can be an option but this must be managed carefully by the family as it should not be expected that the person can set up rides and/or manage money to pay for the fare. Newer driver/companion options are emerging in communities across the U.S. and should also be explored. It is helpful to talk with a social worker or Area Agency on Aging to find these resources.

Enroll your person in the Alzheimer's Association MedicAlert + Safe Return program (www.alz.org). This provides a 24-hour emergency response should your person go missing. Many people with dementia have cell phones and carry them with them. Be sure that the phone is fully charged each day and that the phone is "on" when leaving home. Be aware that under stress, most people with dementia will not use the phone to call home. If your person appears to be missing, don't put off calling 9-1-1!

This may also be the time to consider the possibility of a future move to a more supportive environment, such as an independent or assisted living community, where transportation is provided. Keep the focus on the choices that are truly possible to keep your person feeling as independent as possible in the community setting.

Above all, focus on the disease and not on the individual when discussing your concerns about driving. This is a difficult time for your entire family, but the goal of your discussion is to avoid problems while maintaining your loved one's dignity and independence as much as possible.



To learn more about this topic, we invite you to join the Dementia Dialogue Webinar with Dr. Anna Burke, on Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 12N – 1pm (AZ time). Registration required: www.banneralz.org/dementialogues or call 623-832-3248.



Ask The Expert

Anna D. Burke, MD
Geriatric Psychiatrist
Stead Family Memory Center

Dear Dr. Burke,

My mother has mild Alzheimer's Dementia. My brother and I recently began to notice dings and scratches on her car that hadn't been there before. Last week, she became lost while driving. We are concerned about her ability to continue to drive and feel it is time for her to stop. What is the right way to discuss our concerns with her?

Signed,
Mark

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your question. Unfortunately, you and your family are not alone in struggling with this difficult topic. There is no single "right way" to address this difficult issue. I would recommend that you begin the discussion as a family in a non-confrontational way.

Focus on the disease and its impact – not your mom. Explain the situation directly and share your feelings of concern and worry with your mother. Sometimes this will work. Be patient and firm, but also loving and empathetic. Demonstrate understanding for her sense of loss.

Appeal to her sense of responsibility to keep herself, you, and others in the community safe. Discuss the legal liability of "driving with a medical condition" and focus on "protecting her assets" and those of her family. If she is in an accident, she is considered to be driving impaired. This can result in her insurance refusing to cover the cost of her accident or lawsuits against her and/or her power of attorneys or family. Offer to get a driving evaluation as a way to "protect her assets." Understand that this may be one of many conversations you will have.

Minimize the need to drive by anticipating her needs. For example, have groceries, meals, and prescriptions delivered to her home. Invite family and friends over to her home for regular visits and use these get-togethers to run errands under the guise of social outings. However, while she continues to drive, I'd suggest you ride with her periodically to make sure there are no extreme issues.

If the conversation does not go well, don't blame yourself. The disease can impair insight and judgment, making it difficult for people to understand that their driving is no longer safe. The disease also causes mood and personality changes that make reactions more pronounced. If this occurs, discuss your concerns confidentially with your mother's doctor and allow the doctor to become the "bad guy." Let the doctor take the blame and focus on being there to support your mother. "Mom, I can't believe this happened. We'll figure out a way to get through this." Your role is to be her advocate in maintaining her dignity and sense of independence, while protecting her from potential harms that the disease does not allow her to perceive.

Did you know that you can honor physicians and staff at Banner Alzheimer's Institute through a gift of support? For more information, please contact us at 602.747.GIVE (4483) or visit www.banneralz.org/support-our-mission.



www.banneralz.org
602.839.6900

Sentiments and Situations Group is a new support group to help caregivers to share and problem-solve difficult situations and feelings related to caregiving. In May, we will discuss "Driving and Dementia." Join us on Thurs, May 11, 2017 from 12:30 – 2:00pm at Banner Alzheimer's Institute, 901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix, First Floor Education Center.

Dementia Dialogue Webinar: How to handle driving and dementia.

Dr. Anna Burke will lead the discussion on Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 12N – 1pm (AZ time). Registration required: www.banneralz.org/dementialogues or call 623-832-3248.

In an effort to GO GREEN, we proudly introduce our new online version of our article that is user friendly. Please email us at bannerresearch@bannerhealth.com if you wish to convert to this version.

Have a Question?

To submit your question for future consideration email us at: bainfo@bannerhealth.com





Banner Health®

Banner Alzheimer's Institute
Banner Sun Health Research Institute

Banner Health
901 East Willetta Street
Phoenix, AZ 85006

Caregiver to Caregiver: Advice about Driving

While many caregivers are relieved that giving up driving was not an issue for their loved one, others struggle with the best way to make this happen. In fact, most caregivers admit that they allowed their person to drive longer than it was safe. Here are some important ideas shared by caregivers who have faced driving issues:

- **Accept that there is no single answer or easy way to approach this issue.** Give great consideration as to how you will approach this subject with your person. If the person is likely to have an extreme negative response to you during this discussion (e.g. gets angry, puts you down, walks away), perhaps another family member or friend should be the one to lead the discussion. Weigh out your options and get support from other family members and friends if possible before you mention the topic.
- **Start the conversation early if possible.** Approach this in a matter of fact way like you will be discussing other issues such as health care decisions, what type of care might be needed, etc. However, if your person has no insight into the illness or this situation, there is no need to discuss it as it will end in a fight that you will lose.

- **Observe driving behaviors over a period of time to help you know when it is truly no longer safe.** For some families, it may be a year or two after the dementia diagnosis when it is clear the person should no longer drive. For others, the time might be immediate if you observe unsafe driving practices. A question to ask yourself, "Would I allow my grandchild to ride alone in the car with my person?" If you answer is "no," it is time to take the next steps to stop driving.
- **Get support in making this decision.** Every situation is different, but as a caregiver, you need support as you know this represents a big loss for your person. If your family and friends aren't helpful, find ideas at your support group, or get assistance from your person's physician/dementia specialist.

A great reference on driving is: At the Crossroads: Family Conversations about Alzheimer's disease, Dementia & Driving. The Hartford (www.thehartford.com)



CAREGIVER EDUCATION PROGRAM SCHEDULE

May/June 2017

May

Date	Time	Name of Class	Location	To Register
May 3, Wed.	10:00 a.m. – Noon	Planning Ahead Class for Caregivers	BSHRI	623.832.3248
May 9, Tues.	4:00 – 6:00 p.m.	Planning Ahead Class for Caregivers	BAI	602.839.6850
May 9, Tues.	1:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Banner Brain Health Program	BSHRI	602.230.CARE (2273)
May 10, Tues.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Communication: Avoiding Arguments	BSHRI	623.832.3248
May 10, Wed.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Dementia Friendly Tempe Presents: Legal and Financial Planning for Alzheimer's disease	Tempe Public Library	602.839.6850
May 11, Thurs.	9:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Communication: Avoiding Arguments	BAI	602.839.6850
May 16, Tues.	10:00 a.m. – Noon	Planning Ahead Class for Caregivers	Mesa Red Mountain Library	602.839.6850
May 17, Wed.	Noon – 1:00 p.m. (AZ Time)	Dementia Dialogue Webinar Series: I Have Never had a Ticket in my Life: How to handle driving	Online	www.banneralz.org under events/ education
May 18, Thurs.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Denial: Understanding Why Your Person Doesn't Understand	BAI	602.839.6850
May 18, Thurs.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Finding Meaning While Living with Loss	BAI	602.839.6850
May 22, Mon.	1:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Banner Brain Health Program	BAI	602.230.CARE (2273)
May 24, Wed.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Help at Home: Support for the Person Living at Home	BSHRI	623.832.3248
May 25, Thurs.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	After the Dementia Diagnosis	BAI	602.839.6850

**Banner Alzheimer's Institute
(BAI Downtown Phoenix)**
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix
Register at: 602.839.6850

**Banner Sun Health Research Institute
(BSHRI Sun City)**
10515 W. Santa Fe, Sun City
Register at: 623.832.3248

Tempe Public Library
3500 S. Rural Road, Tempe
Register at: 602.839.6850

Mesa Red Mountain Library
635 N. Power Road, Mesa
Register at: 602.839.6850

**Dementia Dialogues
Webinar Series**
Register at:
www.banneralz.org/
dementialogues
Please note that all
webinars are recorded and
archived on website 24-28
hours after live session
or call 623.832.3248



June

Date	Time	Name of Class	Location	To Register
June 7, Wed.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Residential Care: When moving becomes the best option	BSHRI	623.832.3248
June 13, Tues.	10:00 a.m. – Noon	Planning Ahead Class for Caregivers	BAI	602.839.6850
June 14, Wed.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	As Dementia Progresses	BSHRI	623.832.3248
June 14, Wed.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Dementia Friendly Tempe Presents: Family Conflicts on the Dementia Journey	Tempe Public Library	602.839.6850
June 15, Thurs.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Help at Home: Support for the Person Living at Home	Banner Gateway Medical Center	602.839.6850
June 16, Fri.	1:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Banner Brain Health Program	BAI	602.230.CARE (2273)
June 20, Tues.	10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Medications for Dementia: What are they & what can I expect?	Mesa Red Mountain Library	602.839.6850
June 21, Wed.	9:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Behaviors: Expressing What Words Cannot	BSHRI	623.832.3248
June 21, Wed.	Noon – 1:00 p.m. (AZ Time)	Dementia Dialogues Webinar Series: The Role of Genetics: Will I get Alzheimer's disease?	Online	www.banneralz.org under events/education
June 22, Thurs.	4:00 – 5:30 p.m.	After the Dementia Diagnosis	BAI	602.839.6850
June 26, Mon.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Activities: Filling the Day with Meaning and Purpose	BAI	602.839.6850
June 27, Wed.	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Medications for Dementia: What are they & what can I expect?	BSHRI	623.832.3248

Banner Alzheimer's Institute (BAI Downtown Phoenix)
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix
Register at: 602.839.6850

Banner Sun Health Research Institute (BSHRI Sun City)
10515 W. Santa Fe, Sun City
Register at: 623.832.3248

Tempe Public Library
3500 S. Rural Road, Tempe
Register at: 602.839.6850

Mesa Red Mountain Library
635 N. Power Road, Mesa
Register at: 602.839.6850

Banner Gateway Medical Center
1900 N. Higley Road, Gilbert
Register at: 602.839.6850

Dementia Dialogues Webinar Series
Register at: www.banneralz.org/dementiadialogues
Please note that all webinars are recorded and archived on website 24-28 hours after live session or call 623.832.3248



To learn about upcoming education and support programs dates at:

- Banner Alzheimer's Institute, visit www.banneralz.org and click on "Events Calendar" icon or call Deidra Colvin, Events Coordinator at 602-839-6850
- Banner Sun Health Research Institute, visit www.bannershri.org and click on calendar or call Veronica Flores, Events Coordinator at 623-832-3248

These programs are made possible by the generous support of the Banner Alzheimer's Foundation.



Banner Alzheimer's Institute
Banner Sun Health Research Institute