



DRIVING AND DEMENTIA: BUILDING AWARENESS

As symptoms of dementia change and progress over time, considerations can be made to help continue living as safely as possible. This March, changes to assessments in determining driver medical fitness are being implemented across the province. Safe driving involves a series of complex brain activities and quick physical responses. Dementia causes changes that will eventually affect a person's ability to drive safely, and this can often be a challenging transition.

In response to the changes in the driver assessment process, this issue of *Insight* provides information and tips on driving and dementia. People living with dementia share their thoughts on driving and dementia. We also feature an interview with the newest member of the Society's Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia, where we discuss driving after a diagnosis.

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PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

We asked people around the province who are living with dementia to share their thoughts on driving and dementia, because it's important to start the conversation early on. Here's what they had to say:

How might you know when it is time to stop driving?

- "If had an accident major or minor."
- "Driving around and not knowing where I am going."
- "Noticing a decrease in my reflex time."
- "If my peripheral vision was reduced."
- "Having to concentrate too much."
- "When I was scared."
- "I stopped driving when I lost the location of my car when I would park. It was frustrating and led to stress when I drove home."
- "The Alzheimer's disease clinic told me I had to quit driving."

What makes giving up driving difficult?

- "Not having the convenience of going when and where you want."
- "Depending on others."
- "Losing freedom."
- "Public transportation is very poor in my area."



What are some alternatives to driving that can be used to get around?

- "Walking."
- "Bus."
- "HandyDART."
- "Private services customized to special needs of the client."
- "Caregiver/spouse."
- "Friends and neighbours."
- "I call on my children, neighbours friends and family."
- "I use taxi-saver coupons."

THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER A DIAGNOSIS

Although a diagnosis of dementia does not automatically mean that a person is incapable of driving, eventually a person living with dementia will have to stop driving, as it will no longer be safe.

Giving up a driver's license, whether or not it's done voluntarily, can be one of the most difficult transitions for some people because it can represent a loss of independence, freedom, and mobility. The following information can help you manage this important safety issue.

How dementia can affect you as a driver?

Driving requires complex thought processes and physical responses such as quick reactions, good judgment and remembering the rules of the road. Over time, people with dementia gradually experience changes in skills and abilities that make it unsafe to drive. Signs that suggest you may need to reconsider driving include:

- Getting lost on familiar routes.
- Being unaware of driving errors.
- Missing traffic lights or road signs.
- Having near misses.
- Finding it difficult to stay in your lane.
- Noticing scrapes or dents on your car.

For some people, one incident may warrant concern. But over time, an increase in the frequency of unsafe driving behaviours requires attention. Continuing to drive once you are no longer able to do so safely can put yourself, your passengers, and others on the road at risk. Consider choosing to take yourself off the road when you begin to create a risk for yourself and others.



Managing Changes

If you are still driving, consider the following tips to help you continue to drive as safely as possible:

- Stick to familiar places and familiar routes.
- Drive at quiet times of the day.
- Plan your trip ahead of time.
- Seek a trusted person's opinion on your driving skills.
- Arrange for a driver's test. RoadSafetyBC began using the Enhanced Road Assessment (ERA) to assist in determining driver medical fitness as of March 1, 2018 (which replaced DriveABLE). Contact RoadSafetyBC at 1-855-387-7747 or visit <http://alzbc.org/2FnMTGy>.

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Preparing to stop driving

Preparing yourself and people in your life for when the time comes to stop driving is important. The following steps will help you prepare for the day you have to give up your keys:

- **Talk:** Have conversations early with your care partner, family and doctor to prepare for the changes ahead.
- **Assess:** If you plan to continue driving, ask your family, friends and doctor to assess your capabilities and to let you know when your driving abilities change.
- **Plan:** Plan for your retirement from driving. Begin exploring alternative ways to get around. Try out the plan before you have to stop driving.

Alternatives to driving

Stopping driving doesn't mean you cannot continue being active and engaged. There are many options available if you no longer drive:

- **Family and friends:** You may know people who can help you get from place to place.
- **Community resources:** Research community and volunteer transportation options that may be available in your area.
- **Public transit:** There is a seniors' fare discount and bus pass program. For more information contact B.C. Bus Pass Program at 1 866 866-0800 or visit <http://alzbc.org/2HfleD1>.
- **Walking:** Walking is a great way to keep fit and healthy. Check with your health-

care provider first if you aren't used to walking those distances.

- **HandyDART and TaxiSavers:** To see if these programs are available in the Lower Mainland contact Translink at (604) 953-3680 or visit <http://alzbc.org/2HjpKSf>

Get Support

If you are having a difficult time adjusting to changes in your driving abilities or if you would like additional information and support, connect with your local resource centre or call the First Link® *Dementia Helpline* at 1-800-936-6033.

Source: *Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program. Living safely. By Us For Us Guide®*



PERSONAL REFLECTION

John Paiement recently joined the Society's Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia. For 35 years, John worked as a software engineer before moving into cognitive neuroscience. He is driven by art, science and philosophy. Recently, John shared his perspective on driving while living with dementia.

What is your experiences with driving?

I actually started driving before it was legal for me to drive! I spent most of the 1970s as a musician, so I drove all over the country. I've driven everywhere and almost all of my life.

When did you stop driving?

I stopped driving about ten years ago, when I moved back to Vancouver – many years before the onset of my symptoms and diagnosis. With the amount of traffic in the city, I just said "I'm not driving in this mess." I found I was spending more time sitting in traffic than actually driving. Along with a number of other factors, I just felt it wasn't worth it. Public transportation has also improved, so it's less inconvenient than it used to be.

How has your diagnosis influenced your thoughts on driving?

It's mainly a safety issue, not so much mine, but that of others. One of the most common symptoms of dementia is confusion, especially when we are presented with the unexpected or are in unfamiliar territory. Dementia slows down our ability to react and that can be quite dangerous. Again, it's really not so much about the inconvenience to us, but the potential inconvenience by having a moment where we are not reacting to a situation and causing damage or harm to someone else.

Has it been challenging not driving?

Generally for me it hasn't been an issue. I don't relate my independence to any mode of transportation; my independence is my ability to travel by whatever mode I choose. If I want to go somewhere, I just get up and go – there's always a bus or a train. I also like walking around so I can go somewhere by bus and walk from there. There are times when I get wet or cold, or I have to wait for bus when it's delayed, but these are usually minor inconveniences. It's no different than having to wait in a traffic pile-up to cross the Lion's Gate Bridge.

Do you have any tips for people living with dementia who are currently driving?

There will come a time when a person living with dementia will have to plan to stop driving. It doesn't mean it's going to happen today or tomorrow, but be aware that things will change over time. You will have to make those decisions gradually and monitor your own condition to assure you're not inadvertently a danger to someone else. It just takes that split second. It can be helpful to have this conversation with your family early on after receiving a diagnosis.

I just want to emphasize that who we are is not conditional upon our ability to drive.



John Paiement at an Alzheimer Society of B.C. Event

MAKING YOUR MEMORIES MATTER: HONOREE PROFILE

The *Investors Group Walk for Alzheimer's* is Canada's biggest fundraiser for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. It's a fun and family-friendly way to create new memories while sending a message of hope to the estimated 70,000 British Columbians living with dementia and the people who care for them. Events will take place in 23 locations across the province on May 6, 2018. Each *Walk* is dedicated to an honouree – someone who has been affected by dementia or who has valuably contributed to the lives of people living with the disease. To learn more about your community's honouree and to register today, visit www.walkforalzheimer.ca

Sharon Stone is this year's honouree for Penticton. In early 2017, after Sharon Stone had been diagnosed with dementia, she did a PET scan, a test that shows the blood flow to and from organs. The result confirmed she had amyloid plaque, one of the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease, in her brain. She immediately called her husband to deliver the news: "Honey," she said, "I passed!"

Sharon, who from 1997 to 1999 worked for the Alzheimer Society of B.C. providing support in the Penticton area, applies the same fearlessness and optimism to her dementia journey as to all areas of her life. Though she had mixed emotions about her initial diagnosis, she knew the PET scan results meant she could participate in a clinical trial for a drug that is thought to reduce amyloid plaques in the brain.

"I was actually looking forward to getting on with it," Sharon says. "The whole family knew what was happening – and knew that I was hopefully being part of a cure."



Sharon and her husband Grant.

Because of her experience with the Society, Sharon was well aware of the impact Alzheimer's disease could have on her life. She had also seen her mother cope with the disease. When Sharon's children began noticing the same symptoms in Sharon that they had seen in her mother, she knew what to expect.

Sharon is a former member of the Crestview Curling Club in Edmonton, where she played before moving to Summerland 35 years ago. In 1966 – at just 19 years old – she competed in the Canadian Ladies Curling Championships. She continues to keep fit at Minds in Motion®, the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s fitness and social program for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Through it all, Sharon has maintained her philosophy: "Just do the best you can and don't get discouraged when something goes wrong."

Join the Alzheimer Society of B.C. on Sunday, May 6, 2018 at one of 23 *Walks* taking place across the province. Visit www.walkforalzheimers.ca to read your local honouree's story and to learn how you can participate, or call 1-800-667-3742.



**WALK FOR
ALZHEIMER'S**
MAKE MEMORIES
MATTER™



70,000 reasons to make memories matter!

Join us for the Investors Group Walk for Alzheimer's across
B.C. on Sunday, May 6, 2018.

It's a fun and family-friendly way to create a movement while sending a message of inclusion and hope to the estimated 70,000 British Columbians currently living with dementia and the people who care for them.

Event locations:

Abbotsford
Barriere and area
Burnaby & New Westminster
Cranbrook
Fort St. John
Fraser Valley (Chilliwack)
Kamloops
Kelowna

Nanaimo
Nelson
North Island (Courtenay)
North Shore
Penticton
Port Alberni
Prince George
Richmond & South Delta

Smithers
Tri-Cities & Ridge Meadows
Vancouver
Vernon
Victoria
White Rock, North Delta & Surrey

Register and fundraise today!

Funds raised for the Walk will support programs, education and services in your community. They will also help enable research into the causes and cure.

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

1-800-667-3742
walkforalzheimers.ca

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CONTRIBUTE

We welcome contributions, such as personal stories, photography or original poems, from people living with dementia. Please provide your name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address if you would like to be contacted. All submissions will be considered based on theme and space.

- Email Insight@alzheimerbc.org
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742
- Mail to the Alzheimer Society of B.C., care of *Insight*:
300-828 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

CALL THE FIRST LINK® DEMENTIA HELPLINE

A confidential, province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia, including people living with dementia, their caregivers, friends, family, health-care providers and the general public.

- Phone 1-800-936-6033
Lower Mainland: 604-681-8651
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Email supportline@alzheimerbc.org

ARE YOU A CAREGIVER?

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To subscribe:

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