

Department of
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Driving and Cognitive Health (Mild Cognitive Impairment to Dementia)



Introduction

Driving is a complex task that requires the combination of the following skills in a complex traffic situation:



Visual



Perceptual*



Cognitive*



Physical

*Perceptual refers to the ability to become aware of something through one's senses

*Cognitive refers to the ability to think, reason, remember, imagine, learn, etc.

Introduction



Cognitive health is an important factor that affects one's driving abilities. Cognitively impaired drivers are at least twice more likely to have a crash risk as compared to drivers without cognitive decline.

Drivers who notice changes in their cognitive health (e.g. poorer memory, planning abilities) are strongly advised to seek consultation from their doctors and/or specialists in Memory Clinics.

Introduction



While some cognitive health changes are reversible after diagnosis and treatment, irreversible cognitive changes do occur in people with dementia.

Impaired cognitive health can range between:

- Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) to
- Differing stages of dementia

Driving and Dementia



Dementia is a progressive/worsening medical condition which results in one having a lowered ability to perform learnt tasks over time.

As the stage or severity of dementia progresses/worsens, one's ability to drive safely declines.

Determining one's medical fitness to drive is important for people with cognitive impairment, especially in dementia, to ensure road safety.

Driving and Dementia

Here is a guide to determine if someone with dementia is medically fit to own a driver's license:

1. Moderate to Severe Dementia

People with moderate to severe dementia are medically unfit and are not allowed to drive.

2. Early Dementia/ Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

Many drivers in this category can continue to drive for recommended periods of time. Evidence suggest that their risk of crashes is low (up to three years) after dementia onset, with individual differences between people.

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Driving and Dementia

Drivers in the early dementia/mild cognitive impairment (MCI) category need to cooperate actively with their doctors to:



Review their medical fitness regularly



Undergo driving assessments at recommended intervals (e.g. annually)

Regular reviews are necessary to:

- ✓ Optimise the benefits of driving with safety
- ✓ Prevent a situation where doctors are forced to inform Traffic Police to cancel a driver's licence, when at-risk drivers do not cooperate with them

Driving Assessment for People with Cognitive Impairment/Dementia

Drivers with mild cognitive impairment or early dementia will be referred by a doctor to the **Driver Transition Program (DTP)** for individualised driving assessments on a long-term basis which helps to:

- ✓ Identify the time period which is safe for driving
- ✓ Facilitate the drivers and their family members to actively engage in realistic planning for driver retirement with support

Step 1:

Attend the **Off Road Clinic (1-hour session)**, which includes:

- An **interview with a specialist occupational therapist**, who will ask for information on the driver's situation and functional abilities
- **Basic assessments** of the driver's vision, perception, cognition and motor abilities

A caregiver is encouraged to be present at this session as well.

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Driving Assessment for People with Cognitive Impairment/Dementia

Step 2:

After the Off Road Clinic, the On Road Test is planned and carried out to ensure a realistic assessment of driver performance and safety.

Things that are taken into consideration during the On Road Test include:



The type of vehicle



Driving routes



Different navigation styles



Time of day



Weather conditions



Anxiety from assessment



Poor driving habits

Step 3:

Both verbal and written reports will be given to the driver and their available family caregiver. Their doctor will also provide recommendations based on the reports.

Driving Assessment Clinic
Department of Occupational Therapy

Contact:

6889 4848 (Occupational Therapy Clinic)
6357 7000 (Central Hotline)



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