DRIVING RETIREMENT: CAREGIVER GUIDE FOR NAVIGATING RESISTANCE

Understanding What You're Seeing

If your loved one is resisting the recommendation to stop driving, it is important to understand that this is **not simply stubbornness or defiance**. With dementia, changes in the brain affect:

- Insight (awareness of deficits)
- Judgment and decision-making
- Memory and recall of conversations
- Ability to process reasoning and safety concerns

This means your loved one may **truly believe they are safe to drive**, even when objective evidence shows otherwise.

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1. Stop Trying to "Convince" Them

Repeatedly explaining test results or safety concerns often leads to frustration—for both of you.

Why this doesn't work:

- Memory impairment → they won't retain the explanation
- Reduced insight → they don't believe the concern applies to them

What to do instead:

- Keep responses short and consistent
- Avoid debates or long explanations

Example:

❌ "Your test scores showed impairment and you're not safe to drive."

✅ "The doctor and therapist said it's not safe anymore."

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2. Use External Authority (Not Family Blame)

To reduce conflict, shift the decision away from yourself.

Why this helps:

- Prevents "you vs. them" dynamic
- Reduces anger toward family

What to say:

- "Your doctor is requiring this."
- "This is a medical decision for safety."
- "The therapist said driving is no longer safe."

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3. Control Access to the Vehicle (Non-Negotiable)

If your loved one has stated they will continue driving, this becomes a **safety issue**, not a preference.

Steps to take:

- Remove all keys (including spare keys)
- Keep keys out of sight
- Consider moving or disabling the vehicle if needed

Why this matters:
Even a single unsafe driving event can result in serious harm to your loved one or others.

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4. Avoid Repeating the Conversation Daily

With dementia, your loved one may bring up driving repeatedly.

Important:
Re-explaining each time can restart the argument and increase agitation.

Instead:

- Give a brief, consistent answer

- Redirect immediately

Example:
Loved one: "I'm driving today."
Caregiver: "No, we've already talked about that. Let's go together—I'll drive."

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5. Redirect and Replace the Activity

Driving is more than transportation—it represents:

- Independence
- Identity
- Routine

If you don't replace it, resistance increases.

Helpful strategies:

- Maintain familiar routines (Publix, beach, errands)
- Let them choose where to go
- Allow them to sit in the passenger seat of their car

Example:
"Where do you want to go today? Let's take your car—I'll drive."

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6. Expect Emotional Reactions

Common responses include:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Repetition
- Blaming others

This is a combination of:

- Grief (loss of independence)

- Brain changes from dementia

Reminder for caregivers:
You are not causing this reaction—the disease is.

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7. Watch for Safety Risks

Statements like:

- "I'm going to keep driving"
- Searching for keys
- Attempting to leave the house

…indicate increased risk.

If this occurs:

- Increase supervision
- Ensure no access to vehicle
- Follow up with physician if concerns escalate

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8. Simple Phrases That Help

When emotions are high, keep it simple:

- "I'm not taking this away—I'm keeping you safe."
- "We've already made that decision."
- "Let's go together—I'll drive."
- "You're still getting where you need to go."

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9. What Your Loved One Is Experiencing

Even if they don't express it clearly, your loved one may feel:

- Loss of independence
- Fear

- Confusion
- Frustration

Your role is to:

- Maintain safety
- Provide reassurance
- Preserve dignity

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10. You Are Not Alone

This is one of the most difficult transitions families face.

You are:

- Protecting your loved one
- Protecting others on the road
- Following medical and clinical guidance

That matters.

This guide is provided for educational purposes only and is intended to support caregivers in navigating conversations related to driving safety and driving retirement. It is not a substitute for medical advice, legal guidance, or individualized clinical decision-making.

Recommendations regarding driving status should be made in collaboration with the referring physician and, when applicable, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FLHSMV). Individual circumstances may vary, and caregivers are encouraged to consult with appropriate professionals regarding specific concerns.

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