

SAFETY SENSE

Driving With Dementia

(NAPSA)—New information may make it easier for sufferers of dementia—and their care givers—to deal with the condition.

It is estimated that more than four million Americans suffer from some form of dementia, the most common of which is Alzheimer's.

The condition often involves extreme bouts of confusion and forgetfulness that can make it difficult to perform everyday tasks such as balancing a check book or cooking a meal. Consequently, for many, a diagnosis of dementia can represent the loss of independence.

Psychiatrists say one major issue surrounding dementia is driving. Losing the ability to drive and the independence associated with it can cause depression and feelings of helplessness in sufferers of the condition. Therefore, deciding when a person with dementia can no longer drive can be a difficult choice for a family or caretaker to make.

A recent study conducted by MIT and The Hartford, underwriters for AARP Auto and Homeowners Insurance Program, found that for many families of dementia sufferers, the answer is to watch and learn. The study—cited in an online guide called *At The Crossroads: Alzheimer's, Dementia and Driving*, made available by The Hartford Financial Services Group—reported that paying close attention to the long term driving habits of a person with dementia can help assure that their keys will not be taken away too early, or too late.

According to the study, early warning signs of dementia induced driving problems include:



Families of people with dementia are encouraged to monitor that person's driving to make sure it is safe.

- incorrect signaling,
- trouble navigating turns,
- confusion at exits,
- hitting curbs,
- moving in the wrong lane,
- getting lost in familiar places.

According to *Alzheimer's, Dementia and Driving*, a person diagnosed with mild dementia doesn't necessarily have to immediately curtail their lifestyle. The disease will, over time, destroy driving skills

The booklet warns however, that persons with dementia who do continue to drive should be monitored carefully.

The decision to continue or stop driving needs to be based on a number of observations and continuing discussions with persons with dementia.

For more information, visit www.thehartford.com and download a copy or write Dementia and Driving Booklet, The Hartford, 200 Executive Blvd., Southington, CT 06489.