

## Driving safely as you age



### Meet Jean-Louis...

Jean-Louis is 75 years old and has recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Jean-Louis is the main driver for himself and his wife. He has been asking:

### Should I continue driving?

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease does not automatically mean that you can not drive. However, at some point in time, the effects of Alzheimer's disease will make you unsafe to drive.



### How might Alzheimer's disease affect safe driving?

The effects of Alzheimer's disease are different for each person. Some of the effects of this disease may interfere with your ability to drive. For example:

- **Memory:** You may have difficulty remembering things and familiar places.
- **Decision making:** You may find it more difficult to make decisions.
- **Attention:** You may have difficulty doing more than one thing at a time or you may be easily distracted.
- **Reaction time:** Your reaction time may be slowed.
- **Judgement:** You may not recognize when you can no longer do tasks safely.
- **Impulsiveness:** You may act quickly without always thinking about your actions.





## Warning signs of unsafe driving

- You lose your way.
- You have less confidence in your driving skills.
- You notice other drivers honk at you.
- You miss stop signs or traffic lights.
- You mix up gas and brake pedals.
- You have problems with lane changes or merging.
- You have minor accidents or traffic tickets.
- Your passenger needs to help you.
- Family and friends refuse to get in the car with you.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to make some changes to your driving strategies or have your driving evaluated.



## Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in driving situations that are risky. Here are some strategies that can be used to reduce the risk:

### Strategies to reduce the effects of Alzheimer's disease on driving

- have regular medical checkups and ask your medical doctor about your ability to drive
- have a formal driving assessment
- recognize what is stressful for you while driving (e.g. busy traffic)

- plan your trips so that you avoid stressful situations when possible
- limit distractions when you drive (e.g. turn off the radio)

### General strategies

- choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats
- make sure your vehicle is in good working condition
- make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirror are properly adjusted
- limit driving at night, in bad weather, during rush hour or on limited access highways
- be careful when changing lanes, making a left-hand turn or merging into traffic
- maintain a safe following distance
- take breaks if you are driving a long distance
- have regular medical checkups
- make sure you know how your medications might affect your ability to drive safely





## Strategies for family

When a person is unable to recognize or admit that his or her driving abilities are no longer safe, as family members and caregivers, you often have to take this issue into your hands. This can be a difficult task and you should prepare yourself ahead of time.

- seek support and information from others – family members, medical doctors, occupational therapists, certified driver rehabilitation specialists
- start the discussion when everyone is relaxed and there is enough time to talk
- observe your family member while driving
- keep a written record of unsafe driving behaviours over time
- don't leave your family member feeling abandoned
- offer alternatives and support
- you may need to take the keys if necessary

### Getting help

- an occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate your driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help you find alternative transportation
- a driver information session or refresher course may be useful for your driving



## Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel that you are safe to drive or you have been told that you can no longer drive. Here are some strategies to help:

- plan ahead: planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving
- make a personal transportation plan:
  - collect information on local transportation options
  - check the blue pages or the Internet for local or regional transportation service providers and for government or community services for older adults that may offer transportation services
- become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options

**Remember:** Never be afraid to ask for help from other family or friends.

### Jean-Louis' decision

Jean-Louis understands that he will have to give up driving eventually, but until then, he and his wife are going to monitor his driving ability and will discuss this with his medical doctor. He and his occupational therapist are making a plan together for alternative transportation.

**What strategies will you use?**

## RESOURCES



**For more information**

[www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

**Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists:** [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

**Alzheimer Society of Canada:** [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)

**American Occupational Therapy Association:** [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)

**Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists:** [www.aded.net](http://www.aded.net)

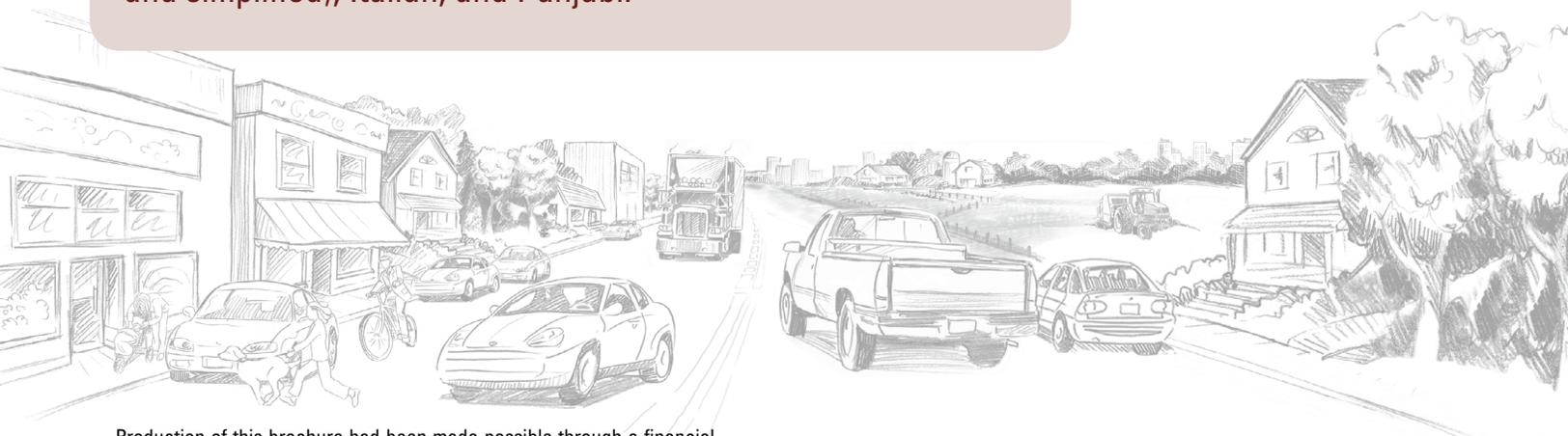
**Canadian Automobile Association:** [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca)

**Hartford Group:** [www.thehartford.com](http://www.thehartford.com)

**Public Health Agency of Canada:** [www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)

**Seniors Canada:** [www.seniors.gc.ca](http://www.seniors.gc.ca)

This information is also available in French, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Italian, and Punjabi.



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