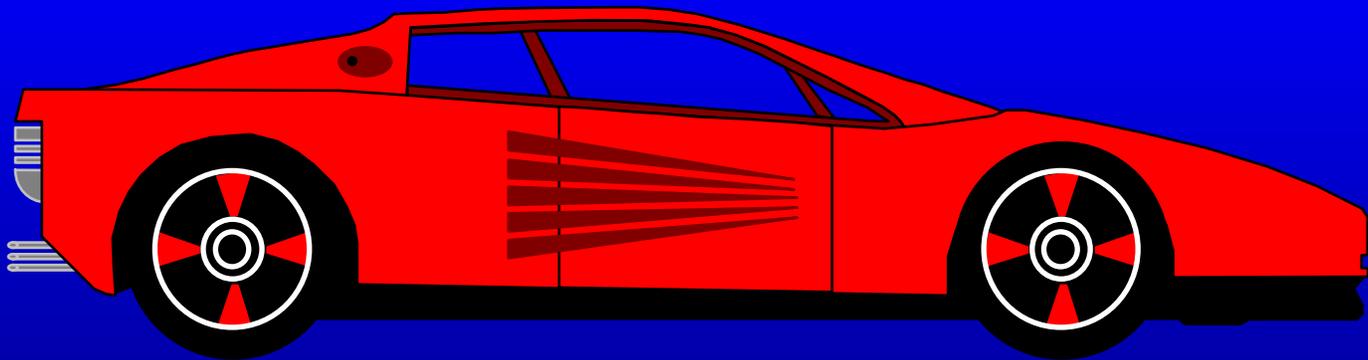


Memory Loss and Driving: A Recipe for Trouble

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Dementia:

- Symptoms of a progressive irreversible degenerative brain disease
- Generally affects older adults but can be seen in people as young as 35-40
- About 100 different diseases can cause dementia
- Usually start and progress very slowly
- Many people are never diagnosed!
- Symptoms can vary day to day
- No cure or really effective treatment at this time
- Medications may help with behavioral problems
- Most people with dementia are cared for at home by family

Non-AD Dementias

- Alzheimer's disease, strokes, and variations of Parkinson's disease are the most common
- Frontal lobe dementias (Pick's disease) are often the problematic as the patient may have little behavioral control
- When dementia presents with Parkinson's disease, the person frequently develops psychosis that may produce fear and a tendency towards violence.
 - paranoid ideas
 - hallucinations
 - delusions
- Other causes: drugs, alcoholism, HIV

In dementing illness all of the symptoms are behaviors!

- Loss of intellect
 - memory for recent events
 - sense of “time” (emergency calls at night)
 - ability to make decisions (telephone solicitors know this)
 - ability to comprehend written material (mail solicitations)
 - ability to understand spoken language or express themselves (increased vulnerability to telephone solicitations)
 - poor judgment (driving)
 - problems with abstraction, inability to reason (driving)
 - problems with complex activities (taking medications, trash in house)

In dementing illness all of the symptoms are behaviors!

- Personality changes
 - increased self-absorption
 - poor self control and impulse control (driving, wandering, purchasing, vulnerability to scams, cursing or “mouthing off”)
 - mistaken perceptions
 - The person with AD does not see and hear what you do! (driving, poor depth perception, inability to see things that move across the horizon, very sensitive to noise)
 - Hallucinations, delusions, paranoid ideas
 - Getting lost in familiar territory
 - Paranoid ideas
 - does not respond predictably

In dementing illness all of the symptoms are behaviors!

- Decreased function
 - Slow loss of ability of how to plan and accomplish daily activities
 - Early - driving, money management, shopping
 - Mid - cleaning, cooking, bathing, grooming
 - Late - dressing, toileting, walking
 - Terminal - being mobile, eating, recognition
- Task performance is consistently inconsistent!
 - This can make families think behavior is purposeful and promote abuse

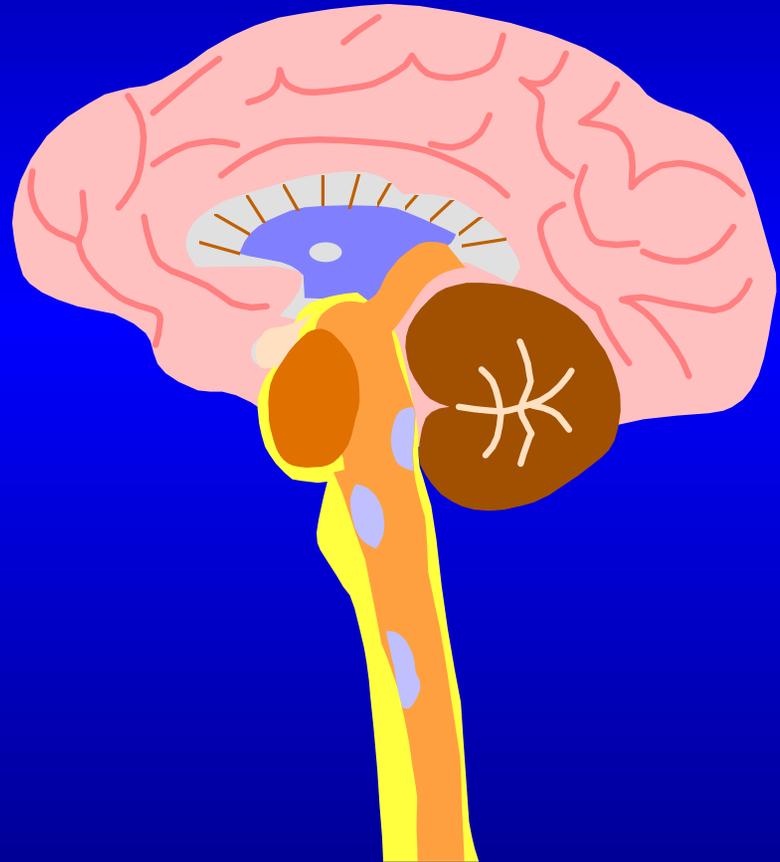
In dementing illness all of the symptoms are behaviors!

- Loss of ability to tolerate stress
 - Wandering - common to wander in the car
 - Aggression/combative behavior - towards other drivers
 - Night-time confusion or Non-recognition of familiar places
 - Acute confusion
 - Psychosis or panic

Alzheimer's disease = high risk
of problems with driving

Why is Safety a Problem?

- Lost ability to reason
- Lost sense of danger
- Vulnerability to strangers
- Impulsiveness
- Inability to inhibit
- Poor memory
- Visual-spatial perceptual alterations



The Person May Still Look and Sound Normal!

But be very vulnerable to hazards that
may be life threatening

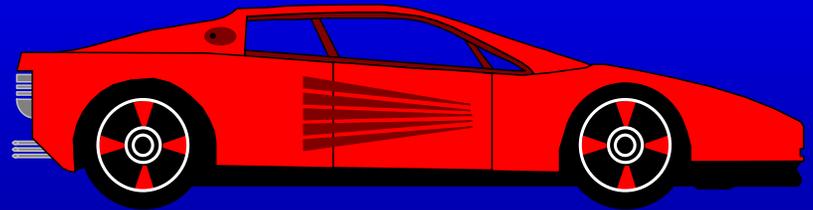
The person may agree to avoid
hazards from now on....

But is unable to stop themselves



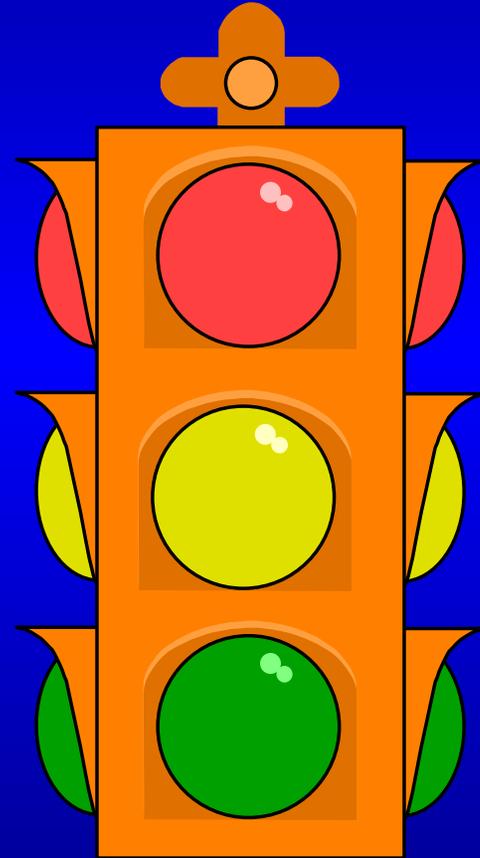
Driving

- Errors of distance between cars
- Getting lost (miles and miles and miles)
- Speeding or driving too slow
- Going the wrong way on a one-way street
- Accidents/mishaps
- “Getting even”
- Driving erratically/intoxication



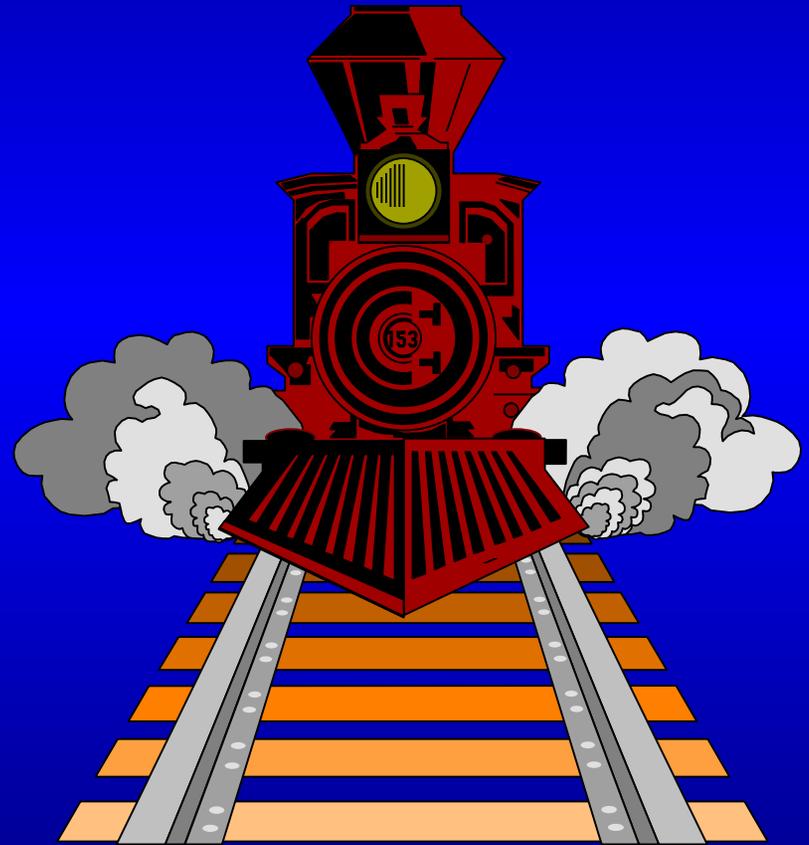
Driving

- Missed turns
- Not stopping at signals
- Sudden Stops
- Driving too slow or fast
- Mistakes in judgment
- Getting lost



Driving

- Causing accidents
- Driving truck, tractor
- Driving erratically
- Fender benders
- Backing through the garage
- Missing train signals
- Refusing to stop driving



“But I’ve Driven Safely All My Life!”

- Assume a sympathetic, but firm stance
- Get help from your family, lawyer, and doctor
- Hide the keys
- Exchange the keys
- “Break” the car
- Buy a new different car

Quite early in the disease the
person will become confused in
emergencies



Losing one's license is traumatic and must be done with compassion

- **Report to the DOT**
- **Have MD report to DOT**
- **Do not wait for next license to expire**
- **Have attorney speak with and write to patient**
- **Expect grieving or acting out.**



My general rule for families:
If you don't want your children
in the car, the person should not
be driving!

We have a responsibility to our
fellow citizens