

PD & Driving

"I have been diagnosed with Parkinson disease. Can I still drive?"

This is a very common question and the answer is....it depends, probably yes for a while, but eventually no. Driving is associated with independence, control and freedom. Giving up driving is seen as a milestone of decline and a loss of mobility. This does not need to be the case - alternatives do exist for getting around (though they may not be quite as convenient). The decision to stop driving is not an easy one for the driver or family members from both practical and emotional perspectives. However, when driving is no longer safe, driving must stop.

In early PD, driving can usually continue as before. Medications will help control symptoms but be aware of side effects that may cause sleepiness.

How does PD affect driving?

- PD affects people's ability to multitask – driving is all about multitasking!
- Slowness and stiffness make it difficult to move your head, making it hard to shoulder check
- Tremor or extra movements (dyskinesia) in arms and legs may affect steering, breaking and accelerating
- Reaction times are slowed making it harder to quickly react to something suddenly moving into the path of the car – a child, another car, an animal
- Eye movements can be a problem, making it hard to see and follow what is around you
- Medications for PD may make you sleepy or confused
- Thinking, concentration, judgement and insight can be affected by PD so it takes longer for decisions to be made. This may be very dangerous when driving.

Tips for driving

- Drive only when your medications are working – this may mean planning ahead!
- Remove all distractions while driving – no radio, avoid conversation, keep noise level in car to a minimum
- Choose familiar routes
- Avoid driving in bad weather
- Avoid driving at night
- Drive only when well rested
- Keep to the speed limit and maintain a safe distance from other cars
- Avoid driving for long stretches at a time

Sometimes the person with PD doesn't recognize they are no longer safe to drive. This is a sensitive topic. Many family members are reluctant to approach this topic. Talk with your doctor about any concerns you or your family have about driving.

If you want your driving assessed, services like DriveABLE will objectively assess your driving abilities. The information is sent to your physician who will share the results with you. There is a cost associated with this assessment.

It is important to remember physical and medical conditions that could affect your driving ability **must be reported** to Alberta Transportation. This can be done by the individual with PD, their physician or by a person concerned about someone's driving.

If it is time for you to stop driving, it will take time to adjust to a new way of getting around. This may be challenging.

Suggestions for alternative ways to get around:

- Rides from family or friends
- Use of public transportation
- Use of taxi cabs – often less expensive than owning a car unless you drive >6,000 km per year!
- Walking
- There may be organizations – religious, seniors groups, community service organizations – that provide rides for those without cars