



One of the most common measures of independence for an adult is driving.

However more than 50 million Americans have mental or physical disabilities that impact their driving skills. The good news is that as the quality and access of adaptive equipment for vehicles improves, more of those Americans are maintaining their independence on the road.

A new program at Dean Health System is helping to make that happen as safely as possible. The Dean **Driver Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program** provides a systematic way for health care providers to evaluate the safety and ability of drivers who want to get or stay behind the wheel, making specific recommendations for rehabilitation, adaptive equipment, restrictions or training.

"The goal is to keep people as independent as possible for as long as possible and to do it as safely as possible," explains occupational therapist **Connie Hansen, OTR/CHT, Dean's Regional Manager for Therapy Services.**

"We want to help you keep driving so you can get to work, get to school, take care of your family and your daily needs without relying on other people."

### A Comprehensive Approach

Dean doctors were looking for a more objective and systematic way to help patients and their families decide whether driving is possible.

"For most people who think they can't drive, we can find a way," shares **Jessica Curkovic, OTR/CHT, one of the Dean occupational therapists** who performs the first step of the evaluation.

To be eligible for the driver evaluation and rehab program, you must be at least 15 years old with a valid driver's license or temporary permit, be seizure-free for at least one year or have a physician's authorization that the seizures are under medical control, and have a written referral from your doctor.

The program itself is a three-step process:

**Step One: Occupational Therapy Evaluation**  
One of Dean's occupational therapists will perform a comprehensive functional evaluation, including:

- Vision
- Visual perception
- Cognition
- Sensation
- Range of motion
- Strength
- Coordination

"From an occupational therapist's viewpoint, we're trying to help people be as functional as possible," shares Connie Hansen.

**Step Two: Behind-the-Wheel Evaluation**  
Incorporating the results from Step One, you will then be evaluated behind-the-wheel. Our behind-the-wheel evaluator is an occupational therapist and licensed driving instructor, as well as a driving rehabilitation specialist.

This portion assesses many factors, including judgment and decision-making skills, visual awareness and vehicle operation. Step Two helps determine how much any disability impacts your ability to drive safely.

"It's really important that our professional partner for the behind-the-wheel portion is an occupational therapist in addition to being a driving instructor," explains Jessica Curkovic. "She is trained in identifying those deficits and how they impact driving skills."

**Step Three: Rehabilitation Program**  
Depending on the results of the evaluation, a rehabilitation program may be recommended.

### Who Can Benefit from This Program?

The Driving Evaluation & Rehabilitation program can be beneficial for people with many challenges, including:

- Alzheimer's and Dementia
- Amputation
- Arthritis
- Brain Injury
- Cerebral palsy
- Learning/Cognitive Disability or Autism
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Neuropathy
- Orthopedic Injuries
- Pain Syndromes
- Post-Polio
- Senior Drivers
- Spina Bifida
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Stroke
- Visual Impairment

...and more!

Recommendations may include occupational therapy or physical therapy to improve weaknesses or train compensations. Adaptations to your vehicle may be necessary, along with training and practice. Recommendations may also include driving with certain restrictions, such as the need to drive alone for someone with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or only being allowed to drive somewhere familiar – like the grocery store.

### Other Considerations

While insurance may cover the occupational therapy evaluation and rehab portion, the behind-the-wheel portion is never covered. However, both Hansen and Curkovic report that a variety of community resources are available to help fund this program.

"We work with you to find funding if needed," shares Jessica Curkovic. "Don't let that stop you from investigating your options."

Another benefit of this program is the ability to objectively evaluate someone's current status so that family and friends aren't left to confront a loved one about their concerns and/or near misses.

"I think the bottom line is that driving is a privilege," claims Curkovic. "If you are going to drive, you need to do it as safely as possible. We can help them do that."

For more information go to:

**deancare.com**

or call the driving evaluation intake line at  
**(608) 294-6094**  
and leave a message

American Heart Association 

**Family & Friends:  
Adult/Child & Infant CPR**

**Wednesday, April 22**

**Three classes: 9:00 am, 3:30 pm, 6:00 pm  
(2 1/2 hours each)**

**Dean Surgery Center Conference Room  
616 N. Washington St., Janesville**

Learn the proper techniques for lifesaving CPR through this free class taught by American Heart Association certified instructors. This class is open to all and is **free**. Pre-registration is required.

**Call (608) 755-3500**

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