



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

But what happens if you can no longer drive due to special circumstances or a disability? Perhaps you've had a stroke and need to recover some function. Maybe you've had an amputation or only have limited use of one of your limbs. Do you suffer from arthritis or chronic pain? Are you concerned your aging parent will forget how to get home? Maybe your child has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and you're wondering if they can handle a driver's license or if it should be postponed.

More than 50 million Americans have mental or physical disabilities that impact their driving skills. And 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. "Driving is a daily task. It's an important component of daily living."

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. 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 ADD or only being allowed to drive somewhere familiar – like the grocery store – for an elderly person who shouldn't be driving in a new area where lots of decisions need to be made quickly.

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. It gives family that peace of mind and gives the questionable driver an objective, comprehensive review of their driving skill with options and recommendations to move forward.

"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

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!