

# Staying social wards off depression when older women stop driving

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Staying mobile via public transport can help with social activities. Credit: University of Queensland

Stopping driving is linked to depression in older women, but the negative mental effects can be buffered by maintaining social contact and participating in social activities.

University of Queensland School of Psychology Professor Nancy Pachana said it was important that people maintained their [mental health](#) as they aged, because depression was linked to a decline in quality of life and to poor physical health, declines in cognitive function, increased

disease and death.

"Older women are more likely to stop driving and more likely to stop driving prematurely, and are also more vulnerable to depression than older men," Dr Pachana said.

The research compared mental health and levels of social support in women who continued to drive versus those who stopped driving.

Over a period of nine years the researchers followed 4000 women in their late 70s and 80s participating in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH).

Women who stopped driving reported poorer mental health. Those who stopped driving but maintained their social contacts – staying involved in [social activities](#) such as the theatre, religious services, sporting events, card games and the like – reported better levels of mental health.

"There's a sense of losing control and independence when you stop driving so it's important to have [social support](#) and take action to put alternatives in place before you or a loved one has to stop," Dr Pachana said.

Steps to reduce social isolation could include talking to neighbours, connecting with friends and family through regular phone calls, being active on the internet, learning the public transport system, taking advantage of courtesy bus systems or car-pooling with friends and family.

Driving cessation programs such as UQ's [CarFreeMe](#) help instruct older drivers about how to stay mobile via [public transport](#), and can assist in maintaining access to social activities.

The research is published in the journal *International Psychogeriatrics*.

Provided by University of Queensland

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