



Problem-Solving Memory and Decision Making

On the Water 65Plus

Problem-solving and memory abilities help us process and store information, make decisions, and respond appropriately to different situations.

When navigating on the water, reduced memory, decision making and problem-solving abilities can affect our capacity to monitor the environment, respond to unexpected situations and make safe decisions to avoid collisions or other incidents.

Reduced memory can also affect planning and preparation for a trip. All boaters should consider the use of checklists to include: safety gear; engine start-up and shut-down procedures; and important contact information.

Dementia

Dementia is a condition that causes a progressive decline in a person's memory, speech, concentration, judgement and ability to plan. The most common type of Dementia is Alzheimers and although dementia can affect anyone, it is more common in people aged over 65 years. Dementia however, is not a normal part of ageing.

On-water activities involve complex tasks that require attention, memory, judgment and the ability to plan. These include judging distances, reading navigation markers, interpreting environmental conditions, maintaining a course, and keeping a safe lookout for hazards. We also rely on these skills to return to familiar places, follow rules for safe boating and prevent mistakes when operating a vessel.

Conditions such as advanced stages of dementia result in a decline of these skills and the inability to safely operate a vessel.

If you, or a family member or friend, notice any changes to your steering and navigation ability, it's important to seek medical advice to assess your health and help you manage the condition and keep you boating longer.

Signs to look out for

- Becoming disoriented or lost while operating a vessel or watercraft in familiar areas
- Forgetting the purpose of the trip
- Not being able to locate your vessel at a marina, or your car and trailer at the boat ramp
- Having difficulty making quick decisions in busy or restricted waterways, or in challenging conditions
- Confusion or difficulty recalling the rules and regulations for safe navigation
- Not seeing other boats, paddlecraft, swimmers or obstructions in the water
- Having difficulty berthing your vessel, or with trailer operations
- Having slower reaction times
- Difficulty using the throttle, steering wheel, tiller or helm
- Confusing the vessel controls, battery isolators or winches.

Alzheimer's Australia NSW has produced a guide 'Staying on the move with dementia' for people, families and carers living with dementia. To download the guide visit <https://www.dementia.org.au/>