

The Aging Driver's Safety Guide

Millions of aging adults continue to drive in order to keep their independence. This can be a concern for well-meaning family, friends, and caregivers; worried about the safety of their loved ones, other drivers, and pedestrians. With age, hearing and vision worsens in adults. Changes in the brain can make aging drivers less aware of their surroundings and reduce their ability to respond quickly when on the road. For older adults, the key to staying on the road is being aware of warning signs of unsafe driving and improving driving skills.

- Memory problems can cause car accidents when senior drivers venture into unfamiliar territories. Drive on streets close to home, use familiar roads, and consider mapping out a location if traveling to a new destination.
- High stress driving situations can be difficult for some aging adults to handle. Avoid driving during rush hour traffic and plan a route that only uses right turns if left-handed turns are too difficult to maneuver.
- The day before a doctor's appointment or other scheduled meeting, drive to the location. This will prevent getting lost and confused.
- Slowing down helps older drivers to be more aware of their surroundings. Driving too slow however, can also be a hazard. Drive at a reasonable speed based on the posted speed limit.
- Older drivers are more likely to be drowsy at nighttime and have trouble seeing. Run errands in the morning and avoid driving after dusk.
- Regular vision checkups, wearing eyeglasses, cataract surgeries and laser eye correction help improve vision.
- Look out for signs that driving performance is failing: side swiping parked cars, bumping into mail boxes, backing into other cars in parking lots and driving in the wrong lane could indicate a problem that needs addressing.
- Consider alternative methods of travel. Caregivers, family members and friends can often provide rides. Public transportation could be an option and free shuttle services are available in some areas. Volunteer programs offered by nonprofits and local religious organizations are another possibility.
- Take an accident prevention program. The American Association of Retired Persons provides training specifically for those aged 50 and over; these programs address changing driving laws and age-related issues.
- Stay physically active and get regular checkups to test for joint stiffness and muscle weakness. These health problems can make it harder to press the break or turn your neck to the side to safely make lane changes.
- Ringing in ears, trouble understanding what others are saying, and inability to hear traffic noises can be dangerous. Look for flashing signals on the vehicles dashboard and have your hearing tested every few years.
- Aging drivers can change driving patterns to reduce accident risks. Avoid rear-end collisions due to reduced reaction time by not driving on freeways and leaving additional space when traveling behind other cars.
- Medications can cause drowsiness and may require aging drivers to temporarily stop driving. Read all labels and consult with your primary care physician before taking new prescriptions, over the counter drugs, or herbal remedies.
- Get driving skills evaluated with a driver rehabilitation specialist offered by hospitals or an instructor from a private driving school. They provide a comprehensive review of driving capability and make appropriate recommendations.
- Having the right equipment will help ensure safety on the road. Power steering, automatic transmissions, pedal extenders and seat belt extenders are helpful. Occupational therapists can be consulted for recommendations for adaptive car equipment.

- Ensure maintenance is done on vehicles being driven by aging drivers to check for: adequate tire pressure, brake fluid levels, dash lights operating correctly, and engine leaks.
- During every car trip, aging drivers can check that their mirrors are clean, adjust mirrors to remove blind spots, and adjust seat height to reduce glare from oncoming traffic.
- Local area agencies on aging and senior centers can provide information to help aging adults continue driving.
- If an aging driver becomes a threat on the road due to dementia or other physical or mental impairments, families and other concerned individuals can intervene to protect their loved one and others. Inform the agency responsible for driver testing in your state. They will conduct an investigation and suspend an older adult's license if necessary.

Aging drivers and loved ones can find additional information for on the road safety at:

- [New York State Office for the Aging](#): A guide helping aging drivers, family, and loved ones understand how to drive safely and assess driving risks.
- [American Academy of Family Physicians](#): Tips for elderly individuals looking to increase driving safety.
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#): Information for older road users to evaluate health conditions and review driving risks.
- [National Institute on Aging](#): Learn how age affects driving and what resources are available.

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