



Driver Safety for Seniors

Older and Wiser, Behind the Wheel

There's a lot to be said for patience and experience, qualities that are generally more common in older drivers than teenagers and people in their twenties. Unfortunately, as we age, we also develop physical issues that make driving more challenging. Here are some of the common issues older drivers need to be aware of and address:

VISION

Most states require motorists to undergo eye tests before renewing their licenses. Age-related vision changes affect more than near and distance vision.

- Over the years, our pupils get smaller and don't dilate as much in dark conditions. By age 60, the average person's eyes need three times as much light to see in the dark.
- The ability to resist glare and see reflective road signs and markings at night decreases with age.
- Older eyes take longer to focus when looking at something close up or looking at something in the distance. This slows reaction time.
- Peripheral vision tends to be reduced with age.
- Vision changes from common eye conditions such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, or cataracts may have been progressing without your knowledge, causing vision impairment.

HEARING

According to the National Institute of Health, approximately one-third of Americans over age 65 have some degree of age-related hearing loss, a hazard for drivers who need to hear approaching emergency vehicles or a passing motorcyclist.

REFLEXES

As we age, our processing speed and reaction time slow down, especially in situations where we are getting a variety of stimuli from different sources.

MOTOR SKILLS

Common age related physical issues like arthritis or sciatica can cause discomfort and reduce flexibility, making it difficult to get behind the wheel, turn your head to check your blind spot, or brake in a hurry.

MEDICATION

Some medications or combinations of medications can cause reactions that threaten driver safety, such as sleepiness, blurred vision, dizziness, slowed movements, nausea, or fainting. The more medicines you use, the greater your risk that your medicines will affect your driving.

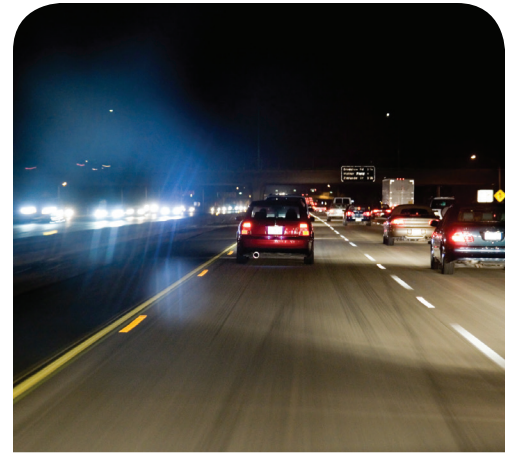
Tips for Driving Safely as You Age

The best general advice for extending your driving years is regular exercise for your body and mind, to help you stay well. Below are some more specific measures you can take to be a safer driver:

- Minimize left turns. Senior drivers age 65 and older are statistically more likely to have accidents involving left turns. Choose intersections with designated left turn lanes or make three right turns to avoid making a left.
- Look for a car with senior-friendly features. Entering and exiting your car should be as easy as possible. A thicker steering wheel is easier to control. A variety of assistive equipment is available to help seniors drive longer, including panoramic rear, side view mirrors, and seat lifts for those who have trouble getting in and out of the car.
- Make sure you adjust your mirrors to minimize blind spots, and arrange your seat so that you can fully step on the foot pedals without sitting too close to the airbag.
- Don't tail gate! In fact, increase your following distance so you'll have more time to slow down or stop.
- Eliminate distractions inside the vehicle. Never use your cell phone while driving. Avoid adjusting the radio.
- Plan your route in advance so you don't have to make last minute decisions on your way to your destination.
- Try to avoid rush hour, busy highways, and congested traffic. The more vehicles on the road, the greater the likelihood of a collision. If you don't like highway driving, use surface streets and local roads.
- Consider using public transportation. It's a great way to catch up on your reading!
- Wear sunglasses, or have them readily available.
- Get plenty of sleep before a long drive and take as many breaks as you need to.
- Review ALL medications, including over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements, with your doctor or pharmacist.

Unsure About Whether You Should Continue Driving?

Get a formal driving assessment by a trained professional. You can get a referral from your local DMV, a rehabilitation facility, the Veteran's Administration, or some senior organizations. If a friend or relative has concern about your safety behind the wheel, listen to what they have to say. Giving up your keys does not mean giving up control of your life.



Pointers for Night Driving

- Decrease your speed so you will be ready to brake if an obstacle beyond your headlights suddenly appears.
- Increase the distance between your car and the car in front of you.
- At night, it's easy to miss a pedestrian in dark clothing, walking on the side of the road. Keep moving your eyes and look beyond the horizon.
- Watch for flashes of light from hilltops or around a bend which may mean a vehicle is coming your way.
- Protect your eyes from headlight glare. Prolonged exposure can impair visibility, strain your eyes, and make you drowsy.
- If an ongoing vehicle has its high beams on, look down toward the right side of the road and use the painted road divider to stay on course until the vehicle passes.