



## Safer Driving for Older Adults

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As people age, physical changes can challenge abilities that contribute toward safe driving. These can include being able to turn the head to look for oncoming traffic, or reaction time for braking safely. With honest assessment and attention to one's own physical condition, illnesses, and overall abilities, older drivers can help themselves to remain safe on the road. The Mayo Clinic offers seven tips for older drivers.

**1. Stay physically active** to improve strength and flexibility. In turn, physical activity can improve driver safety by making it easier to turn the steering wheel, look backward over the shoulder, and make other movements while driving and parking. Walking is a great choice for many people to add physical activity into their schedules. Stretching and strength training exercises are also helpful for older drivers. Please note that anyone who has been mostly sedentary should get their doctor's approval before increasing activity level.

**2. Schedule regular vision and hearing tests** in order to catch any problems and to find solutions. Hearing and vision tend to decline with age - impaired hearing can limit the ability to hear approaching emergency vehicles or trains, while common age-related vision problems including cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration can make it difficult to see clearly or drive at night. Even those who think their hearing and vision are fine are advised to stick to their doctor's recommended exam schedule. Problems might be easier to correct if caught early, and specialists can recommend timely adjustments to reduce accident risk.

**3. Manage any chronic conditions**, especially those that might impact driver safety such as diabetes or seizures. A doctor can help to advise on managing the condition(s) and staying safe behind the wheel such as adjusting treatment plans or restricting driving to daytime. It's equally important to know one's medications and how they affect driver safety, even when feeling fine. Read medication labels to know what to expect, and don't drive if taking a medication that causes drowsiness or dizziness. Consult with your doctor or pharmacist with any concerns about side effects or the medicines' impact on driver safety.

**4. Understand your limitations** and make any necessary adjustments. For example, a steering wheel cover can make holding and turning the steering wheel more comfortable if gripping it hurts your hands. Consider asking your doctor for referral to an occupational therapist who can offer assistive devices to help with driving or suggest exercises to help overcome personal limitations. Some vehicles

have larger, easier-to-read dials on the dashboard, and some newer models offer safety features that could help drivers to avoid collisions, change lanes safely, manage blind spots, and more.

**5. Drive when the roads — and you — are in good condition.** Driver safety can improve by driving during the daytime, in good weather, on quiet roads and in familiar areas. Consider delaying your trip or using public transportation if visibility is poor. Beyond road conditions, make sure you yourself are in optimal condition to drive - don't drive if tired or angry, after drinking alcohol, or using other mind-altering substances including marijuana prescribed for medical use.

**6. Stash your cellphone and focus on the road** to avoid distracted driving. Take steps before driving to ensure your ability to focus - plan the route ahead of time to keep from needing a map while driving, or enter the destination into a GPS device. Call ahead for directions if needed. While driving, don't do anything that removes focus from the road, even eating or adjusting the radio. Make a pledge to never use or even look at your cellphone while driving. The National Safety Council also advises against any type of phone conversation or voice-to-text features while driving, including hands-free and Bluetooth devices.

**7. Update your driving skills** by taking a refresher course for older drivers. This might even earn a discount on car insurance depending on the insurance company and policy. Look for courses through community education programs or local organizations. The [American Automobile Association](#) offers online and other resources about senior driving including helpful safety features, proper seating and fit, and information on refresher courses.

Giving up your car keys doesn't need to end independence. Consider other options if needed to keep yourself and others safe on the road.