

# NEWS

## FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

### Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully

(NAPSA)—For many Americans, driving is a way of maintaining independence. Changes that occur in people as they age, however, can affect their ability to drive safely. The following tips may help you determine whether physical changes are affecting your driving skills, and if so, how to cope with them so you remain a safe driver for as long as you can.

1. Good vision is essential for good driving health. Do you have problems reading signs or recognizing someone you know from across the street? Do you have trouble seeing lane and pavement markings, other vehicles and pedestrians—especially at dawn, dusk, or at night? Does the glare of oncoming headlights cause you discomfort?

If you have experienced any of these symptoms of declining vision, always wear your glasses and keep your prescription current. Keep your windshield, mirrors, and headlights clean, and your headlights aimed correctly. If you're 60 or older, see an eye doctor every year.

2. Diminished strength, coordination, and flexibility can impact your ability to safely control your vehicle. Do you have trouble looking over your shoulder to change lanes, moving your foot from the gas to the brake pedal, or turning the steering wheel? Do you feel pain in your knees, legs, or ankles when going up or down stairs?

If you've experienced any of these symptoms, talk with your doctor about physical therapy or medication, and/or stretching exercises and a walking or fitness program. An automatic transmission, power steering and brakes, and other special equipment can make it easier for you to steer your vehicle and operate the foot pedals.

3. Driving requires dividing your attention between more than one situation at a time. Do you feel overwhelmed by traffic signs, and pedestrian and vehicle traffic? Do you take medications that make you drowsy, or do you experience dizziness, seizures, or losses of consciousness? Do you react slowly to normal driving situations?



**Older Americans should regularly assess their driving skills.**

If you do, consider planning a route that you are familiar with and try to drive during the day (avoid rush hour). Keep a safe distance between you and the car ahead of you, and try to make left turns where green arrows provide protected turns. Scan the road continuously to anticipate future problems and plan your actions.

Sometimes other people are the best judges of your driving ability. If someone has expressed concerns about your driving abilities, talk with your doctor. He or she can evaluate the side effects of the medications you may be taking. Consider taking a mature driver class through AAA, AARP, or a local driving school. Learn about transportation options in the community and consider trying them out.

While everyone wants to keep driving for as long as possible, no one wants to be a threat to themselves or to others because they are no longer able to drive safely. Self-awareness is the key. With smart self-management, you can retain the personal mobility that comes with driving, while limiting the risks to yourself and to others.

For more information on traffic safety for older users, visit the NHTSA Web site at: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/index.html> or write to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St. SW, Washington, DC 20590. You can also fax your request to 202/366-7721.