

Safety On The Road

Protecting Your Ability To Drive Safely For As Long As Possible

(NAPS)—Driving a car means maintaining independence for many older adults. Driving allows you to shop, see friends and family, keep up with medical appointments, and avoid social isolation. But sometimes staying safe behind the wheel as you age can be a challenge.

Age-related physical and mental changes can affect your ability to drive safely. If you're alert to these changes and manage them carefully, you may be able to continue driving safely for some time.

To keep your skills as sharp as possible, consider following these suggestions from experts at the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), healthcare professionals dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of older people:

Check your eyesight to keep it as sharp as possible by getting a complete annual eye exam once you turn 60. Test yourself to monitor your vision:

- Do you have problems reading street signs?
- Are you having difficulty seeing road or pavement markings, curbs, or other vehicles or pedestrians, especially at dawn, dusk, and nighttime?
- Is glare from oncoming headlights making it hard to see when driving at night?

Assess your physical fitness to drive by asking yourself:

- Can I comfortably turn my neck to see over my shoulder when I change lanes?
- Can I easily move my foot from the gas pedal to the brake? Can I easily turn the steering wheel?
- During the past year, have I fallen one or more times?
- Do I regularly walk more than a block a day?
- Can I raise my arms above my shoulders?

Perform a reality check on your attention span and reaction time:

- Are you overwhelmed by signs, traffic signals, and car and pedestrian traffic, especially at busy intersections?
- Does it seem harder to merge into traffic on the highway?
- Do you take any medications that make you sleepy, dizzy, or confused?
- Do you feel less confident about driving at highway speeds?
- Do you react slowly to cars entering your roadway, or to cars that have slowed or stopped in front of you?

Pay attention to changes and warnings:



It may be the safest, wisest course to get help with your driving before you have to give it up.

- Have friends or family members expressed worries about your driving?
- Have you ever gotten lost on familiar routes or forgotten how to get to familiar destinations?
- Has a police officer pulled you over to warn you about your driving?
- Have you been ticketed for your driving, had a near miss, or a crash in the last three years?
- Has your healthcare provider warned you to restrict or stop driving?

Consider Getting a Professional Driving Assessment

If you've experienced driving problems like these or are worried about your ability to be a safe driver, consider getting a professional assessment of your skills.

Occupational therapists trained as driving rehabilitation specialists can evaluate your driving skills and strengths, as well as any physical, visual, and cognitive challenges you may face. They can also evaluate your ability to operate a vehicle safely and, if needed, recommend ways to reduce your risks.

Driving rehabilitation specialists are trained to evaluate older drivers for:

- Muscle strength, flexibility, and range of motion
- Coordination and reaction time
- Judgment and decision-making skills
- Ability to drive with special devices that adapt your vehicle to your needs

The specialist may recommend ways for you to drive more safely after the evaluation. Suggestions may include getting special equipment for your car or helping you sharpen your skills.

Not sure how to find a driving rehabilitation specialist? Talk to your healthcare provider or contact the American Occupational Therapy Association for a directory. You can also visit the AGS's public education website, <https://www.healthinaging.org/driving-safety>, for more safe driving resources for older adults and caregivers.