

Older Adult Drivers

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Quick Facts (CDC)¹

- In 2009, there were 33 million licensed drivers over the age of 65 in the United States.
- In 2008, more than 5,500 older adults were killed and 183,000 injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- Fatal car crash incident rates increase starting at age 75.
- Declines in vision, cognition, and mobility contribute to decreased driving ability for older drivers.

Age Related Changes That Can Affect Driving²

- Vision
- Hearing
- Motor Control
- Medical Conditions
- Medications
- Mind and Cognition

Physical Therapy Evaluations³

- Timed Up and Go test: a time > 9 sec may indicate an increased risk of a motor vehicle crash
- Decreased cervical range of motion impairs ability to turn the head and scan for traffic
- Decreased upper extremity and lower extremity range of motion impairs ability to operate car controls
- Grip strength < 35 lbs for men and 30 lbs for women may impair ability to manipulate the steering wheel
- Decreased proprioception and sensation can impair ability to modulate pressure on foot pedals

AAA and Driving Evaluations⁴

- Self-Rating Tool
 - Designed to help you examine your ability to drive safely.
 - 15 question survey
- Scoring:
 - Total number of squares x 5
 - Total number of triangles x 3
 - Add totals
 - 0-15 = **GO!** aware of importance for safe driving and practicing what you know
 - 16-34 = **CAUTION!** You are engaging in some practices that need improvement
 - 35+ = **STOP!** You are engaging in too many unsafe driving practices.

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following 15 questions, check the symbol (✓) of the one answer that best describes you.

| | Always or Almost Always | Sometimes | Never or Almost Never |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Signal and check to the rear when I change lanes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I wear a seat belt | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I try to stay informed on changes in driving and highway laws and techniques | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Intersections bother me because there is so much to watch from all directions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I find it difficult to decide when to merge with traffic on a busy interstate highway | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. When I am really upset, it affects my driving | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. My thoughts wander when I drive | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Traffic situations make me angry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. I get regular eye exams to keep my vision at its sharpest | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I check with my doctor or pharmacist about how the medications I take affect my driving ability. (If you do not take any medication, skip this question.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I try to stay informed of current information about health and well-being habits | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. My children, other family members or friends have expressed concern about my driving ability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Note new headings: | | | |
| | None | One or Two | Three or More |
| 14. How many traffic tickets, warnings, or "discussions" with law enforcement officers have you had in the past two years? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="triangle"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. How many collisions (major or minor) have you had during the past two years? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Self Scoring: Count the number of checkmarks in the squares and record the total in the square below. Follow the same procedure for the triangles and circles.

These are your Check Mark Totals. For score and interpretation, see next page.

AAA and Driving Evaluations⁵

- Interactive Driving Evaluation
 - Confidential self-screening program
 - Computer-based exercises
 - 30-45 minutes to complete
 - Offers suggestions to keep you safe behind the wheel
 - Recommended to take the evaluation yearly
- 8 Key Areas:
 - Leg strength and general mobility
 - Head and neck flexibility
 - High contrast visual acuity
 - Low contrast visual acuity
 - Working memory
 - Visualizing missing information
 - Visual information processing speed
 - Visual Search

AAA and Driving Evaluations⁶

- Professional Assessment:
 - Driving skills evaluations
 - In-car evaluation of driving abilities
 - Recommendations for any further training
 - Clinical assessments
 - Identify underlying medical causes of driving deficits
 - Offer ways to address issues
- When to get a skills evaluation:
 - Concerns about driving skills
 - Concerns about self-assessments
 - Medical diagnosis that can affect your driving ability (impaired vision, dementia, diabetes, seizures, sleep disorders, stroke)

Senior Defensive Driving Through AAA⁷

- Keeps older drivers up-to-date on driving techniques
- Sharpens defensive driving skills
- Member pricing: \$25
- Non-members: \$30
- Class location: Springfield, VA 22150
 - 7701-A-2 Southern Drive
 - Phone: 877-457-0711
- Classes offered on Saturdays; 8 hour classes

Educational Materials for Patients⁸

- National Institute on Aging
Brochure for Older Drivers
 - Your body
 - Your vision
 - Your hearing
 - Your reactions
 - Your health
 - Your medications
 - Are you a safe driver?
 - Is it time to give driving up?
 - How will you get around?

More Tips For Safe Driving

Planning before you leave:

- ✦ Plan to drive on streets you know.
- ✦ Limit your trips to places that are easy to get to and close to home.
- ✦ Take roads that will avoid risky spots like ramps and left turns.
- ✦ Add extra time for travel if driving conditions are bad.
- ✦ Don't drive when you are stressed or tired.

While you are driving:

- ✦ Always wear your seat belt.
- ✦ Stay off the cell phone.
- ✦ Avoid distractions such as eating, listening to the radio, or having conversations.
- ✦ Make sure there is enough space behind your car. (*Hint: If someone follows you too closely, slow down and pull over if needed to let that person pass you.*)
- ✦ Use your window defrosters to keep both the front and back windows clear.
- ✦ Keep your headlights on at all times.

Car safety:

- ✦ Drive a car with air bags.
- ✦ Check your windshield wiper blades often and replace them when needed.
- ✦ Keep your headlights clean and aimed in the right direction.
- ✦ Think about getting hand controls for both the gas and brake pedals if you have leg problems.

When to Advocate for Driving Services/Screenings?

- Patient demonstrates decreased functional mobility, vision, hearing, or cognition.
- Patient medication list or medical diagnoses indicates negative effects on driving abilities.
- Family members/caregivers offer concerns for the safety of the patient.
- Any patient over the age of 65.

Suggestions for Advising Patients

- Role of practitioners is to do functional and medical assessments to determine overall driving safety.
- Age-related and disease-related changes in physical and functional mobility can decrease safe driving ability.
- Screening tools are available to ensure safety of older drivers and to offer suggestions for improvement in weaker areas.

When/How to Discuss Driving Cessation⁹

- When: older drivers deny or are unaware of their deficits or are not making improvements with treatment
 - Benefits of safety to the patient, pedestrians, and other drivers
 - Negatives of social isolation, worsening functional status, impaired quality of life, clinical depression, maintaining independence
- What to discuss:
 - Issues relevant to driving safety
 - Potential driving cessation
 - Patient transportation needs
 - Alternative transportation resources

Advice for the Family¹⁰

- Be patient and expect to have several conversations to reach a balance between safety and independence.
- Know that men may require more conversations than females.
- Don't be discouraged by initial negative conversations.
- Share your general concern for the family member's safety and your hopes to protect the driver's best interests.

Reporting Drivers¹¹

- Virginia DMV Medical Review on ability to operate an automobile
- Will require the older driver to submit a medical/vision screen from their physician, pass a two-part driver's license knowledge exam, and pass a road skills driving test
- DMV determines whether to:
 - Suspend driving privileges
 - Restrict driving privileges
 - Require the driver to submit periodic medical/vision screens

References

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