

Becoming a Non-Driver? Find Alternate Transportation Options.

You've been concerned about the safety of an older adult because they are still driving and probably shouldn't be. Or, you might be worried about your own safety on the road, because you've realized that your skills are no longer as sharp as they need to be to meet the demands of driving.

Driving often represents independence for older adults. What's more, getting to social events, medical appointments, shopping outlets, and recreational activities is important for healthy living as you age.

In fact, when older adults stop driving, their health can worsen. According to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, giving up the keys nearly doubles the symptoms of depression for older adults, and it may also increase declines in physical and mental health.

So when older adults stop driving, it's crucial to maintain their independence by creating alternative transportation solutions.

To do so, make a transportation plan.

That means sitting down with the older adult and determining where they drive on a regular or even occasional basis. Write down the specifics of each trip, including the general time of day the driver goes there, how long they stay, and any other relevant details.

Then, research the travel options available in your area, and select those that match the older adult's specific needs for each trip they make. You might even want to list them on your transportation plan.

For example, if an older adult attends a weekly faith-based gathering, **think of different ways they could get there.** Maybe people from the faith community can provide rides on a rotating basis. The key is, make sure you've got all the older adult's trips covered with a transportation option so they can continue to enjoy their usual activities.

Transportation options will vary depending on your community. These may include:

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Some faith-based and community non-profit organizations often have people who volunteer to drive older adults to various places. Each organization offers different options. Rides are either free, on a donation basis, or through membership dues.

PARATRANSIT SERVICES

These include mini-buses and small vans run by public transportation, aging organizations and private agencies. These services may require people to make reservations in advance, but you often have scheduling options and flexibility. Generally, the transportation provided is curb-to-curb, meaning you meet the vehicle at the curb or roadside and get dropped off at a curb or roadside stop. Some services will pick you up at your door and deliver you right to a specific address. Reduced fares may be offered to senior citizens.

DOOR-THROUGH-DOOR SERVICES

Some agencies provide drivers or escorts who will help you get from your home into a waiting vehicle. This service is particularly helpful to older adults who are disabled or need support while walking. Your local aging organization will help see if this is available in your neighborhood.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Buses, trains and subways, trolleys, and other mass transit options have established routes and times. They may offer reduced fares for older adults and may be accessible for people with disabilities. Your local public transportation department can provide information about fares, schedules, and accessibility.

TAXI SERVICES

You have several different options for accessing car services. In some cities, you can simply hail a cab on the street. (Make sure you can hail a cab on the other end of the trip as well.) You might also be able to call ahead for a cab, or access rides from car services such as Uber or Lyft. These services often require downloading an app onto a mobile device such as a cell phone and may only be available in larger population areas. They also may require pre-registering and often providing credit card information.

It's a good idea to do some research ahead of time to find out the following information about any car services you might use:

- How much do rides cost?
- What method is used to charge for rides? Is it calculated by mileage or by time?
- How far in advance you need to make a reservation?
- Are the vehicles accessible if you use a wheelchair or walker?
- Will drivers help you in or out of the car if you need assistance or have packages?
- What areas do the cars serve and what's the maximum distance they'll take you?
- Are drivers properly licensed, insured, and checked by appropriate agencies?
- If drivers provide their own vehicles, are they properly inspected, registered and insured? Do cars have safety belts and other safety features?

Depending upon your needs, these services may also be helpful:

TRAVEL TRAINING

Some public transportation departments and local organizations that support older adults provide free training classes to help both older adults and people with disabilities access and use local public transit safely and independently. These services help you find the best routes to take to reach the destinations you visit, the cost of the trip, and how to pay for it (exact change, travel cards, tokens, discounts, vouchers, etc.)

Many agencies also provide one-on-one demonstrations about how to ride public busses and trains in your area.

MOBILITY MANAGERS

In some communities, these people can help guide you through the various transportation options available near you. They understand the local transportation network and can explain how it works. Your local aging organization or public transit agency may be able to connect you to a mobility manager.

TRANSPORTATION VOUCHER PROGRAMS

Area Agencies on Aging, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and other social service organizations may offer financial help with transit fares if you qualify (usually for lower-income older adults or people with disabilities). You have to apply for these programs and you are still responsible for reserving and accessing the transportation service you need.

RESOURCES

Elder Care Locator (800.677.1116)

National Center on Senior Transportation (866.528.6278)

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (202.872.0888)