

Safety Tips for Older Drivers

Many older adults can drive safely well into their 80's, or even beyond. However, since various physical issues linked to aging can interfere with safe driving, it's important that older drivers—and the people who care for them—evaluate their needs to keep them safe while they're on the road.

These tips and resources can help older drivers take essential steps to maintain their safety:

SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES	Buckle up before starting the car—every single time. If your seatbelt is uncomfortable, adjust the shoulder mount or buy a shoulder pad that slips over the belt.
MUTE YOUR CELL PHONE	Talking or texting while driving can distract you from the road ahead. Leave your cell phone on silent and do not answer it while you're driving.
DO NOT EAT WHILE DRIVING	Eating is another activity that can distract you while driving. If you must eat or drink, pull into a safe area such as a parking lot and finish all refreshments before getting back on the road.
DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE	As people age, their ability to process alcohol may change. Even one cocktail or a glass of wine or beer may make older drivers unsafe on the road, especially when mixed with different medications.
LIMIT DISTRACTIONS	Listening to music or audio books or even chatting with your passengers can distract some older drivers. If you're among them, turn off the sound and avoid having conversations with others in the car.
WATCH THE ROAD	Make sure there is always enough space between your car and the cars in front of you. Also, maintain a safe distance from traffic behind you.
DRIVE DURING DAYLIGHT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE	Older adults, even those with good vision, can experience visual problems at night due to age, such as glare from oncoming headlights.

AVOID BAD WEATHER

Rain, snow, fog and other hazardous conditions can be especially dangerous for older drivers. Let the bad weather clear before you get on the road. If you must travel, use public transportation or a car service.

CHOOSE SAFER ROUTES

Try to avoid highways that have ramps, which can be dangerous for older drivers. Also avoid highways or busy roads where you have to make left turns. It's better to go a little out of your way to avoid difficult intersections and turns.

TRY TO DRIVE WHEN THERE'S LESS TRAFFIC

Peak rush hour traffic can be stressful for all drivers, but it can be particularly stressful for older drivers. Try to limit driving to those times when there's less traffic on the roads.

STRESSED OR TIRED?

Stay where you are until you're well rested and calm. Driving when you're not at your best can be dangerous.

CONSULT A DRIVING REHABILITATION SPECIALIST

These professionals 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

After the evaluation, the specialist may recommend ways for you to drive more safely. Suggestions may include special equipment or training. You can find a specialist at www.aded.net.

INVESTIGATE THE “CARFIT” PROGRAM

CarFit is an educational program sponsored by the AAA, AARP Driver Safety, and AOTA (American Occupational Therapy Association). At a CarFit event, health professionals and experts who specialize in helping older drivers will work with you to make sure your car is properly adjusted for your safety. A CarFit exam takes about 20 minutes to complete. Find a CarFit program near you here.

Recently, the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) looked at 16 new vehicle technologies. They found that these six features helped to reduce crashes and make driving less stressful for older adults.

- Forward collision warning.** These systems, which are available in many newer cars, can warn you if you're about to have a crash. When a potential collision is detected, the car automatically applies the brakes. The AAA/UMTRI study suggested that this technology might improve reaction times and reduce crashes by up to 20%.
- Automatic crash notification.** Some cars are equipped with communication technology. In case of a crash -- typically one that triggers air bags to go off -- the car signals emergency services that you've been involved in a crash. Emergency services can be notified about the crash without anyone having to call 911.
- Parking assist with rear-view display.** Back-up cameras allow drivers to clearly see what's behind them as they back up. This makes parking easier. Some cars are also equipped with an obstacle-detection warning system, which will notify you if you're about to hit something.
- Self-parking systems.** Some cars have technology that takes over steering while the car parallel parks itself.
- Navigation assistance.** According to the study, turn-by-turn GPS systems make older drivers feel safer, more confident, and more relaxed while driving. However, some of these systems may be distracting and difficult to use. Make sure to choose one that is easy for you to use.