

# Highway Horse Sense

## How Old Is Too Old To Drive? Ⓢ

(NAPSA)—Driving has long been a family affair. Be it family road trips, the infamous “backseat driver” in the family or teaching a teen how to drive, driving is a hot topic for families. What’s more, families also play an important role in encouraging safe driving practices among their older loved ones.

“Families nationwide are dealing with the sensitive issue of older driver safety,” says Elinor Ginzler, AARP’s Director of Livable Communities and an authority on older driver safety. “AARP encourages families to talk openly with loved ones about safe driving practices. Older drivers trust the advice of family—be it spouse or children—when it comes to their well-being.”

Today, about one in seven drivers is age 65 or older. This figure is expected to rise significantly in the years ahead, increasing the need for safe driving practices. By the time the last baby boomers turn 65, in 2029, about one in four drivers will be age 65 or older. Older drivers face different challenges on the road than do their younger counterparts. Age-related changes—such as impaired vision and slower reflexes and response time—can affect their driving skills.

Older drivers may be able to maintain safe driving skills as well as extend their driving years by:

- Conducting regular self-assessment of driving capacities
- Attending a driver-refresher course

- Recognizing and addressing vision changes
- Maintaining quick reflexes and flexibility by staying physically active
- Therapeutic interventions from certified driving rehabilitation specialists.

However, if older drivers continue to experience a decline in driving abilities, it might be time for them to consider limiting driving or hanging up the keys altogether. If you or a loved one experiences any of the following signs, it might be time to talk about safe driving practices and transportation alternatives:

- Frequent “close calls” (i.e., near accidents)
- Dents or scrapes on the car or on fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs, etc.
- Trouble judging gaps in traffic at intersections and on highway entrance/exit ramps
- Getting lost
- Difficulty seeing the sides of the road when looking straight ahead
- Slower response time; trouble moving foot from gas to brake pedal or confusing the two pedals
- Getting distracted easily or having trouble concentrating
- Difficulty turning around to check over the shoulder while backing up or changing lanes
- Frequent traffic tickets or “warnings” by traffic or law enforcement officers in the last year or two.

“Although most older drivers believe that they should be the

one to make the final decision about driving, they also agree that their physician should advise them,” says Dr. Carl Soderstrom, Director of the Driver Safety Research Program for the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration. “By providing evaluations about medical fitness to drive, clinicians can help their patients make informed and wise decisions, or become familiar with mobility alternatives in their community.”

If you are concerned about a loved one’s driving, start a conversation about driving that’s based on your observations. It’s also important that they understand you’re broaching the topic out of sincere concern for their well-being. In recommending driving solutions, offer various options depending on the degree of impairment. For example, suggest that they limit driving to certain times of the day or familiar areas. Additionally, encourage them to gradually begin using alternative transportation, including rides from family and friends, taxis or public transportation.

To help drivers refresh their skills, AARP offers a classroom course, as well as an online driver’s safety course, that teaches safe driving strategies to address age-related changes that affect one’s driving ability.

To learn more about older driver safety, visit [www.aarp.org/families/driver\\_safety/](http://www.aarp.org/families/driver_safety/) or call (888) 227-7669 toll free.