

What To Consider When It's Time To Stop Driving



(NAPSA)—If you're worried about the safety of an older adult who is driving and probably shouldn't—or about your own safety on the road because your skills aren't as sharp as they used to be—you're not alone.

These are common problems—and they now come with expert solutions thanks to health care professionals at the American Geriatrics Society (AGS). With support from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), AGS experts in caring for older adults have put together a toolkit for understanding and assessing safe driving as you age. The toolkit is available from www.HealthinAging.org and it addresses a range of important topics—especially how to talk about when it's time to stop driving.

That's an important conversation, since stopping driving can affect health and independence as people age. Giving up the keys can be linked to depression, for example, and may speed up declines in physical and mental health. That makes it crucial to have alternative plans for transportation when it's time to stop driving independently.

Having the Talk

When you've determined that you or an older adult should stop driving, it's important to make an action plan.

Enlist support. Talk to family and friends. If you need to start a conversation about driving abilities, rehearse the discussion you'd like to have. Depending on the circumstances, you may want a friend or family member to be present to offer support.

Have a compassionate conversation. No one wants to feel “ganged up on,” so frame conversations in a supportive way. Don't let anxiety or fear make you sound angry, for example.

Discuss specifics and avoid blame. Cite examples: “I'm concerned that we didn't stop at the intersection,” or “You seem to be having some trouble driving home.” Health care professionals such as occupational therapists can offer driving evaluations to help you get a sense of driving abilities.

Becoming an Older Nondriver

Driving often represents independence for older adults. Creating alternative travel plans can help with maintaining that independence even when personal driving isn't an option.

Make a transportation plan. Consider how you or an older person you know drives. Note how frequently you drive and the specifics of each trip (destination, distance, time of day and so on). Knowing this information can help you look for alternatives.

Research travel options. Your health care professional or an Agency on Aging (www.eldercare.gov) can point you in the right direction when looking for what's available in the neighborhood. Transportation options may include:

- **Volunteer Programs.** Some faith-based and community organizations have people who volunteer to drive older adults. Each organization offers different options. Sometimes, rides are free; other times, they may come with a donation or membership dues.
- **Paratransit Services.** These include minibuses and small vans run by public transportation systems, aging organizations and private agencies. They may require reservations in advance but they often offer flexible scheduling options. Generally, paratransit services are provided “curb to curb,” meaning that a rider meets the vehicle at the curb and gets dropped off at a curb. In some cases, paratransit is offered at reduced fares for older adults.

- **Door-Through-Door Services.** Some agencies provide drivers or escorts to help older adults get from their homes into a waiting vehicle. This service is particularly helpful for people who have trouble moving or need support while walking. Agencies on Aging can help you see if this service is available to you.

- **Public Transportation.** Buses, trains, subways, trolleys and other mass transit options have established routes and times. They may offer reduced fares for older adults and are generally (but not always) accessible for people with disabilities. The public transportation department can provide information about fares, schedules and accessibility. Look at options carefully to find a route that fits your health and personal needs.

- **Taxi Services.** Several options exist for accessing private car services. In some cities, you can hail a cab on the street or call ahead for one. Ride services such as Uber or Lyft may be good alternatives if you have a smartphone. If you are a caregiver, arranging these services in advance may give you greater peace of mind.

“The bottom line is: Select options that match specific needs for each trip,” said Alice Pomidor, M.D., M.P.H., A.G.S.F., an AGS expert who led the development of the new driving toolkit. “You might even want to list them on your transportation plan.”

For example, if you're worried about attending a weekly faith-based activity, maybe people from the community can offer rides on a rotating basis. The key is making sure you've got all the trips covered with a transportation option that can support staying involved in activities and events that are meaningful.