

Hints To Help You Stay On The Road To Safe Driving

(NAPSM)—For many older adults, retaining the ability to drive is very important. It means independence and makes it easier to do shopping, see friends and family, and keep medical appointments. It's not always a safe option, however.

Physical and mental changes related to aging can affect your ability to drive safely. If you're alert to these changes and manage them carefully, you may be able to continue driving safely for some time.

To keep your skills as sharp as possible, consider following these suggestions from experts at the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), healthcare professionals dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of older people:

Check your eyesight to keep it as sharp as possible by getting a complete annual eye exam once you turn 60. Test yourself to monitor your vision:

- Do you have problems reading street signs?
- Are you having difficulty seeing road or pavement markings, curbs, or other vehicles or pedestrians, especially at dawn, dusk, and nighttime?
- Is glare from oncoming headlights making it hard to see when driving at night?

Assess your physical fitness to drive by asking yourself:

- Can I comfortably turn my neck to see over my shoulder when I change lanes?
- Can I easily move my foot from the gas pedal to the brake? Can I easily turn the steering wheel?
- During the past year, have I fallen one or more times?
- Do I regularly walk more than a block a day?
- Can I raise my arms above my shoulders?

Perform a reality check on your attention span and reaction time:

- Are you overwhelmed by signs, traffic signals, and car and pedestrian traffic, especially at busy intersections?
- Does it seem harder to merge into traffic on the highway?
- Do you take any medications that make you sleepy, dizzy, or confused?
- Do you feel less confident about driving at highway speeds?
- Do you react slowly to cars entering your roadway, or to cars that have slowed or stopped in front of you?

Pay attention to changes and warnings:

- Have friends or family members expressed worries about your driving?
- Have you ever gotten lost on famil-



With age, your ability to drive may diminish—but you can get help to maintain your independence longer.

iar routes or forgotten how to get to familiar destinations?

- Has a police officer pulled you over to warn you about your driving?
- Have you been ticketed for your driving, had a near miss, or a crash in the last three years?
- Has your healthcare provider warned you to restrict or stop driving?

Consider Getting a Professional Driving Assessment

If you've experienced driving problems like these or are worried about your ability to be a safe driver, consider getting a professional assessment of your skills.

Occupational therapists trained as driving rehabilitation specialists can evaluate your driving skills and strengths, as well as any physical, visual, and cognitive challenges you may face. They can also evaluate your ability to operate a vehicle safely and, if needed, recommend ways to reduce your risks.

Driving rehabilitation specialists 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

The specialist may recommend ways for you to drive more safely after the evaluation. Suggestions may include getting special equipment for your car or helping you sharpen your skills.

If you're not sure how to find a driving rehabilitation specialist, you can talk to your healthcare provider or ask the American Occupational Therapy Association for a directory.

For more safe driving resources for older adults and caregivers, visit the AGS's public education website, <https://www.healthinaging.org/driving-safety>.