

## SENIORS AND DRIVING

Driving is a very sensitive issue for most seniors. The more objective the family is about their driving skills and abilities, the more successful the family will be in convincing the senior to limit their driving or stop driving altogether.

A self-assessment form: **Drivers 55+: Test your Own Performance.**

Available from:

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety  
1730 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope and enclose a check or money order for \$2. This may also be available from your local Automobile Club or your State Automobile Association.

Additionally, Mature Driver Improvement Courses are available for drivers 50+. AARP, the National Safety Council, the State Auto Association and your local Automobile Club will also offer this course. The class is 8 hours long. During the class the driver learns the relationship between age and driving skills. The rules of the road are reviewed. Safe driving practices are reviewed. Some insurance companies discount rates for the mature driver who completes this course.

A pamphlet called "A Flexibility Fitness Training Package for Improving Older Driver Performance" is available free of charge from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Physical therapy can improve physical fitness

There is a direct correlation between driving skills and medications in the body. Many drugs prescribed for seniors can impair driving skills; over the counter medications can have the same effect. Alcohol combined with medication can be lethal.

Yearly vision exams are crucial to driving acuity; as people age:

- Glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy become increasingly common
- Peripheral vision is reduced
- They may have trouble telling different colors apart
- Their eyes are more sensitive to bright lights
- Night driving becomes more difficult

If problems exist, encourage the older person to consider the safety of others as they make the decision to change their driving habits.

A complete medical exam is necessary if there are indicators that driving performance is changing.

- Some diseases produce loss of consciousness
- Loss of range of motion in neck, spine and limbs inhibit a person's ability to check the rear and sides of the road
- Weakness in the arms and legs can interfere with steering, braking and accelerating
- Eye-hand-foot coordination changes
- Reflexes change
- Fatigue affects driving

Physicians are required to report and explain findings that relate to driving skills to the DMV, Office of Driver Safety. This is why it is a good idea to let the physician inform the older driver that it is time to consider other forms of transportation. It takes the burden off the family member.

### **How to Negotiate Driving Privileges**

The following questions are designed to assist The Senior's Choice and family members engage in non-emotional conversation to determine whether or not it is time for the senior to stop driving.

1. Sometimes when I drive at night, it's hard to see. Does this happen to you, too?
2. Do other drivers make you nervous? I know I get jumpy when everybody goes too fast.
3. Maintaining a car these days sure is expensive. How do you do it?
4. Isn't parking getting more difficult and expensive these days?
5. I just read about the 55 ALIVE program offered by AARP. What do you know about it?
6. What did the doctor say about your medications and driving?
7. How do you get around when your car is in the shop?
8. Have passengers refused to drive with you? What did you do then?
9. How about letting someone else drive for once?
10. What activities are you afraid of missing? Can anyone else help you get there?
11. When was your last eye exam? How did it go?
12. How much are you paying for car insurance these days?
13. What would you do if a carjacker approached your car?

<p><b>If you don't feel safe driving with an elder, refuse to go with them or take two cars.</b></p>
--