

Giving Up The Key Tips to Help Seniors Know When to Stop Driving

by Joyce Clark, CEO of Achievis Senior Living

Older drivers are more likely to get in multiple-vehicle accidents than younger drivers and car accidents are more dangerous for seniors than for younger people. Intersections are particularly dangerous and account for about one half of fatalities in accidents among drivers age 85 and better. Studies found that when drivers age 70 to 79 were involved in intersection collisions they tended to misjudge whether it was safe to proceed. Those age 80 and better simply failed to see the other car.

Increased road rage, driver impatience, tailgating, and overcrowded roads are making the world of driving more difficult for everyone. You may have driven your entire life without incident but it is critical to realize driving ability can change as you age.

Aging does NOT automatically equal total loss of driving ability but it is important for elders to know their limitations. For instance, you may decide to drive only during daylight if you have trouble seeing well at night. Stay off highways and only use street routes if fast-moving traffic bothers you. Avoid driving in bad weather. If you are going to an unfamiliar place, plan your route before you leave so that you feel more confident and avoid getting lost. Explore ways to reduce driving, such as making purchases online or through mail-order catalogs. If possible, arrange for home delivery of groceries, and home visits by clergy, medical, and personal care providers.

WARNING SIGNS OF UNSAFE DRIVING

Many small warning signs of unsafe driving can add up to the important decision to quit driving. If relatives, friends, or others begin to talk to you about your driving, it may be time to take a hard, honest look at your driving ability. Do you experience any of these warning signs:

- Abrupt lane changes, braking, or acceleration.
- More frequent “close calls” or almost crashing.
- Dents and scrapes on the car, fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs, etc.
- Failing to use the turn signal, or keeping the signal on without changing lanes.
- Drifting into other lanes.
- Driving on the wrong side of the road or in the shoulder.
- Trouble reading signs or navigating directions to get somewhere.
- Missing highway exits or backing up after missing an exit.
- Range-of-motion issues (looking over the shoulder, moving the hands or feet, etc.).
- Trouble moving the foot from the gas to the brake pedal, or confusing the two pedals.
- Feeling more nervous or fearful while driving or feeling exhausted after driving.
- Other drivers honking.

- Reluctance from friends or relatives to be in the car with you.
- Getting lost more often.
- Trouble paying attention to signals, road signs, pavement markings, or pedestrians.
- Slow reaction to changes in the driving environment.
- Increased traffic tickets or “warnings” by traffic or law enforcement officers.
- Thinking the speed limit is too high.

Health problems can increase risk factors. Sometimes medications cause confusion, drowsiness, or blurred vision. Arthritis and certain diseases cause stiffness or tremors that impact the ability to turn the head, brake, or steer. Memory lapses cause some people to get lost or miss exits. Some health risk factors are:

- Medication side effects and interactions.
- Visual decline.
- Hearing problems.
- Limited mobility and increased reaction time.
- Problems with memory.

STEPS TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE TO STOP DRIVING

Driving is not just about transportation. It is about independence and control. If you feel that it is time to talk to an elder about stopping driving, approach the issue with sensitivity.

- Be respectful and empathetic.
- Give specific examples of concerns and incidents.
- Involve other family members, close friend, doctor, or minister.
- Help find transportation alternatives and offer rides.
- Help plan schedules so that rides include social, religious, and fun activities as well as chores.
- Discuss the financial savings of not driving such as no auto insurance or car repairs.
- Understand the difficulty of the transition.
- When all else fails, remove the car.

It takes a lot of courage to stop driving and put the safety of yourself and others first. The good news is that senior living communities such as Heartland Plaza of Moore provide scheduled transportation and outings. Senior living is a popular option that also eliminates chores such as grocery shopping, cooking, housekeeping, and laundry. For more information about safe driving or senior living, call Heartland Plaza of Moore at 405.799.9919.

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