



Get the Facts: Older Drivers Behind the Wheel

In a Nutshell

Our nation is aging and so are our drivers, including those who are still working. This poses unique driving safety considerations.

What should I know about aging drivers?

The good news is research shows older drivers are more likely than their younger counterparts to adopt safe behaviors like wearing a seat belt and complying with speed limits. However, those age 55 and older have twice the risk of dying in a work-related crash than do younger workers. Physical and mental abilities naturally decline with age, putting older workers at greater risk of serious injury if they are involved in a motor vehicle crash. In 2019 motor vehicle crashes accounted for 37% of all work-related deaths among workers ages 55 or older.

Driving safety on the job

- Consider whether work can be done without driving. Reducing the amount of driving workers do is the most effective way to prevent motor vehicle crashes.
- Set policies that allow drivers to consult with their supervisors to adjust driving hours if they have night vision challenges, and to stop driving if they are too tired or the weather is bad.
- Provide "refresher" driving training that includes topics such as safe-driving strategies, changes in road rules, regulations on distracted driving and new vehicle safety features.
- Restrict driving based on assessment of actual driving ability, rather than general health status or an arbitrary age limit.
- Give workers general information about the possible effects on driving of prescription and over-the-counter medications.

By 2030, 20% of the US population will be age 65 or older. As many as 90% will be licensed to drive.

At the same time, the number of workers ages 65-74% will climb to 4.5%, with a 6.4% increase for those over age 75.

What you should know about older drivers

- Older drivers have a lifetime of driving experience. But it's important to keep in mind that everyone ages at a different rate. What's true for one 70-year-old driver may not be





true for another. In general, seniors drive less than other age groups and tend to drive when conditions are safest.

- Physical changes that may affect older drivers' abilities include:
 - *Declining Vision.* Vision provides as much as 85% of the information we need behind the wheel. But vision begins to deteriorate at age 40.
 - *Light.* The amount of light needed to drive doubles every 13 years. Older drivers need more light to see than younger drivers do.
 - *Focus.* The older you get, the longer it takes your eyes to change focus from near to far — something needed when you looking at the rear view mirror and then checking the next intersection. Depth perception declines. Peripheral vision narrows. Eyes are more sensitive to glare. Colors become harder to see.
 - *Diminished strength and flexibility.* Driving has a physical component. Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and limited range of motion can affect older drivers' ability to turn a steering wheel, look over their shoulder, or move from the brake and accelerator pedal or handle the small movements of driving.
 - *Decreased reaction times.* Driving requires attention to dozens of simultaneous activities, which can be challenging for drivers as they age.

Older Drivers Frequently Asked Questions

What can I do to for vision and physical challenges?

- Wear your glasses. Maintain them and replace lost or broken ones.
- See your eye doctor every year.
- Avoid driving at dawn, dusk and night.
- Keep windshield, mirrors and headlights clean.
- Use stretching exercises and walking programs to enhance overall fitness.
- Talk to a doctor about pain or stiffness in arms, feet, legs or neck.
- Buckle up. Always. It's the single most effective thing anyone can do to reduce the risk of injury and death in a crash.

When should I stop driving?

Stay alert to changes. Listen to those around you. If you're experiencing several of the following, it may be time to cut back or stop driving altogether.

- Do passengers in your car seem to offer more suggestions than they used to?





- Are relatives worried about your driving?
- Do you get lost in neighborhoods that used to be easy to navigate?
- Has a police officer cautioned you about your driving?
- Have you gotten tickets for moving violations?
- Have you had near misses or crashes in the last three years?
- Has a health care provider told you to stop driving?
- Have neighbors or friends expressed concern?
- Are there new dents or dings in the car?

What are the signs that an older driver is losing critical behind-the-wheel skills?

The American Geriatrics Society lists the following warning signs as hallmarks of an unsafe driver:

- Running stop signs or red lights without noticing.
- Stopping at green lights for no reason.
- Narrowly missing pedestrians or cars without realizing it.
- Switching lanes or merging without looking.
- Going the wrong way on one-way streets.
- Getting lost in familiar areas.
- Stopping in a middle of intersections.
- Mixing up gas and brake pedals.

How can I persuade an older person to stop driving?

Express your concern. Gather feedback from other relatives and neighbors that may have observed their driving. Ask them to take a driving test or self-assessment. Offer rides or run errands for them.

Talk to the family physician. Doctors can do thorough exams and may write a prescription which restricts driving and a report to the state-licensing agency. Research alternate transportation.

Sources: National Safety Council
Centers for Disease Control
National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health
American Automobile Association
National Institute on Aging

