

Staying Safe as an Older Driver

By: *Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists*

Age alone does not make an older adult an unsafe driver. But age-related changes can affect driving skill. These changes include poorer vision, reduced hearing, slowed reaction times, and less confidence in unfamiliar or busy environments.

Warning signs of unsafe driving

- Driving too fast or too slow for conditions
- Having trouble with lane changes or left-hand turns
- Lack of attention to objects in one's peripheral vision
- Having minor 'fender benders' or near misses
- Noticing that other drivers are showing a lack of patience

Enhancing safe driving

The presence of these warning signs does not automatically mean it is time to give up the keys. There are many ways you can enhance safety as an older driver:

- Attend education and information sessions.
- Make sure the mirrors, seat, and so on are well adjusted and that your vehicle is in good working condition.
- Take a driver refresher course.
- Consult an occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist.

Many older adults continue to be safe drivers by making safe driving decisions, like these:

- Avoid driving situations in which you feel less confident
- Limit driving at night.
- Avoid driving in poor weather.
- Avoid driving at rush hour.



- Plan your route to avoid driving on limited access highways.
- Make a personal transportation plan, e.g. create a personal contract with yourself: "I will only drive during the day and during off peak hours. If I need to go out at night or during rush hour, I will arrange to ride with my daughter/neighbor/taxi service. If I am tired or not feeling well, I will use alternate transportation."
- Become familiar with community mobility options, e.g. create a list of transportation options such as local taxi companies or ride share programs; make sure this information is readily available when you need it

Making a driving retirement plan

All drivers should confront the fact that their ability to drive may not continue throughout life. Before the effects of aging affect their ability to drive safely, older adults should start the transition to driving retirement. They should consider the options for getting around that will suit their needs within their community.

The role of occupational therapists

Occupational therapists are experts in helping their clients to do things that are important to them. Driving is an important activity. Occupational therapists can

evaluate driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, and help create driving retirement plans.

Older driver safety is a priority for the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. We support projects like the National Blueprint for Injury Prevention in Older Drivers. This project promotes safe driving practices and works to prevent and reduce injury. We also advocate for community mobility services. These make our society more inclusive, and help all people take part fully in daily life.

Learn more

- Visit https://www.caot.ca/document/5628/Older_Adults_EN.pdf for more information on safe driving practices.

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