

# Freedom & Safety



A driver's license to most people is a source of pride and independence. It allows them the freedom to have their own schedule.

Many older drivers don't realize that their driving skills are getting worse due to medical or biological conditions. Some are in denial about their abilities. These senior drivers are at a higher risk of receiving traffic tickets for failing to yield, turning improperly, or running stop signs and red lights.

Some states have laws that test older drivers' abilities at the time of license renewal, including on-the-road driving evaluation. Other states rely on physicians and relatives to report suspected driving problems.

In 2001,  
3,164 senior  
adults were  
killed in motor-  
vehicle crashes.

As of 2010, more than  
31 million drivers  
were over 65.

86% of traffic fatalities happen on side roads and  
byways. Only 14% happen on major highways.

## Unsafe Drivers

All drivers, especially seniors, should evaluate their own driving to decide if they have the ability to drive safely, then adjust for any changes in memory, vision, hearing, balance, strength, flexibility, reflexes, and mental clarity.

### Physical changes:

- Strokes
- Memory loss
- Hearing problems
- Anything that limits physical activity



### Vision changes:

- Need more light
- Headlight glare/sunlight glare
- Slowed reaction time
- Reduced peripheral vision
- Inability to distinguish colors
- Dulled vision or difficulty focusing

**Around 90% of  
the driving cues  
we rely on  
are visual.  
Vision declines  
progressively  
starting at age 50.**

**Slower reflexes** due to muscles, nerves, and joints moving more slowly or stiffening due to arthritis or inactivity can create:

- inability to see clearly in mirrors, can't turn head.
- inability to get a good grip on the steering wheel.

**Medications** such as over-the-counter drugs, antihistamines, and sedatives (*pain killers*) can affect driving skills. Multiple medications can cause multiple problems.

**Senior Driving Assessment Programs** are becoming available in many areas. They cover changes in vision, reaction time, and hearing, offering techniques to compensate for those changes. Their goal is to help seniors maintain their independence. Many communities offer door-to-door services, public transportation, or other arrangements that can keep seniors mobile.

## Drive Safely

### Before You Go

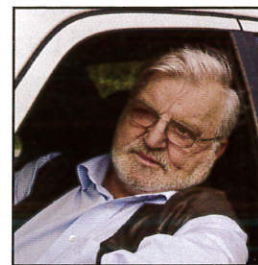
- Exercise and stay active.
- Get regular medical and eye check-ups.
- Wear your glasses & keep them clean. Wear sunglasses or dark-tinted glasses during the day, **but never at night.**
- Keep the windshield clean, inside and out.
- Leave early to allow for extra time.
- Ask a friend or family member to ride along.

### On The Road – Plan Ahead

- Only drive in well-known areas. Avoid busy roads and rush-hour traffic. Take side roads instead of highways. Drive in daylight or on well-lit streets and avoid driving in bad weather (*fog, rain, snow, glare, smoke, etc.*)
- Focus on driving instead of other thoughts, scenery, or conversations.
- Keep extra space between your car and others.

### Making The Right Decision

- Pedestrians ALWAYS have the right-of-way. Watch for them or other cars before changing lanes, backing up, or making a turn, especially in parking lots.
- Turn slowly. Activate your turn signal in advance. (*Turn it off after the turn.*) If left turns are difficult, try rerouting your drive to include several right turns instead.



**Seat belts reduce  
the risk of fatal  
injury by 45%.**

- Use your mirrors when changing lanes. Check all blind spots. Use your turn signal.
- Begin braking as soon as you see the stop sign. Come to a complete stop. Do not pull out unless there are no cars coming and the car in front of you has gone.



## Start Out Safe

**Keep your car in tune with your needs.**

- Your car should have a simple dashboard with controls that are easy to read.
- Use a seat cushion to boost you higher for better visibility and seat belt comfort.
- Make sure windshield wipers are clean and in good condition. Use defrosters.
- Drive with low-beam headlights on at all times to make your car more visible. Keep them clean and have them re-aimed twice a year.
- Turn off the radio and keep heaters, fans, and air conditioning low to reduce distracting noise.
- Have larger mirrors installed or use large, glare-control, automatically dimming rearview mirrors. Electro-chromatic mirrors can reduce glare.
- Make sure your headrest is centered with the back of your head and not your neck.
- Tires should be properly inflated.



**Wear your seat belt all of the time.**

**Adjust your mirrors BEFORE you drive to help stay safe.**



**Left side-view mirror:** Lean your forehead against the driver's side window. Turn the mirror until you can barely see the side of your car.

**Right side-view mirror:** Sit with your head directly facing the rearview mirror. Turn the side mirror until you can barely see the side of your car.

**Rearview mirror:** Keeping your head in the position it is in when you drive, turn the mirror so that you see as much of the entire back windshield as possible.

## Signs of a Problem

**Look for a pattern of mistakes rather than one-time incidents.**



**Brake on yellow; stop on red.**

- ✓ Refuses to listen to driving criticism and/or does not follow instructions well
- ✓ Doesn't obey traffic signs or signals, failure to yield the right-of-way or stop for pedestrians
- ✓ Stops using turn signals or mirrors
- ✓ Problems balancing hand and foot movements, slowed or jerky reactions
- ✓ Problems turning head, neck, and shoulders
- ✓ Quick and sudden stops, for no reason, backs over things, runs over curbs
- ✓ Problems noticing pedestrians, signs, or other vehicles ("They came from nowhere.")
- ✓ Pattern of fender benders, close calls, or tickets, rear-ending a vehicle
- ✓ Drives too slow or off the road, has difficulty keeping the car centered in a lane, crosses lane markings, runs lights or stop signs
- ✓ Crosses in front of oncoming traffic, has difficulty navigating turns, drives the wrong way on a one way street
- ✓ Gets lost or confused easily
- ✓ Hits the gas instead of the brake or both at the same time
- ✓ Increase in other cars honking, tailgating, or expressing "road rage"



**There is no set age that makes a person an "older driver."**