

## More Seniors are driving than ever before

We may joke that 35 is the new 21, and declare that life begins at forty, but in all seriousness, our longer-lived population means that people are staying behind the wheel at far more advanced ages than ever before. Drivers over the age of 75 have, as a group, the highest rate of fatal daytime car accidents. Often, this is due to the fact that senior drivers don't always notice the gradual deterioration of important driving skills, like response time and the ability to make snap decisions. It is important for senior drivers to keep their behind-the-wheel skills sharp, and to be aware of current traffic laws and driving trends. No one wants an accident to be the first sign that there is a problem. As well, staying safe on the road is a key to keeping the insurance discount for mature drivers that many companies offer their over-55-year-old customers. If you have a senior driver in your family, or if you are one, here are some things you should be aware of:

**What do they drive** The car a senior driver chooses makes a difference in how well they drive. Senior drivers need to have vehicles that provide greater freedom of movement, visibility that is unrestricted, and controls that are easy to use. Items to avoid include seats that don't adjust, heavy doors, and poorly designed seatbelts. The latter should be easy to reach and easy to engage. The seats should allow the driver to sit comfortably, and see the road, dashboard displays and rear- and side-view mirrors with no obstructions. Doors should be light enough for someone without a lot of arm strength to pull completely closed, even in windy weather.

**Get Physical** Because physical impairments (poor vision, poor hearing, etc.) may be a detriment to safe driving, it is crucial that senior drivers see their primary physicians for annual check-ups, and ask if driving is still safe. Specific questions that may be asked are, "Where and when should I not be driving" and "What can I do to improve my flexibility and strength" In addition to general physical condition, there are specific ailments common among the elderly that could adversely affect driving. If you (or your senior driver) suffers from any of the following, be sure to confirm with a doctor that it is safe to drive, and if your instinct tells you not to get behind the wheel, don't.

Some conditions that have been mentioned on accident claims are:

**Diabetes:** Senior drivers who are diabetic must be aware of the related complications, like vision impairment and low blood sugar that could affect their driving ability. Low blood sugar can cause moments of disorientation and confusion in all diabetics, senior citizens or not.

**Falling:** Seniors who are prone to losing their balance, or have had more than one serious fall in the past two years should probably not drive at all, or at least should drastically reduce their time behind the wheel.

**Neurological Disorders:** Senior citizens in the earliest stages of dementia may seem perfectly normal most of the time, but they can become easily disoriented or agitated when faced with busy traffic, and this is more likely to occur as the disease progresses. As well, they may get lost, even on familiar streets, confuse the pedals of the car, or lose valuable response time.

**Accident Prevention** In addition to being aware of their own physical condition, seniors may want to consider a few additional measures in order to stay safe on the road. Having another person in the car can often be helpful, if there are no relatives or friends to run errands on their behalf. Family who can help out should offer, rather than waiting to be asked. As well, senior drivers may find that taking a driving class to brush up on their skills may help them feel more confident behind the wheel, as well as help reduce their insurance premium a little more. If a general defensive driving class is intimidating there are special classes for senior drivers offered by the DMV in several states, and AARP also offers their "55 Alive" driving class in both online and face-to-face formats. The golden years shouldn't be tarnished by a lack of transportation. By being aware of their own limitations, and taking steps to compensate, senior drivers can safely stay on the road for many years.

## About the Author

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