

Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully

Older adults rely on driving to maintain personal mobility, support-independence, and ensure ongoing good health. Aging alone, does not determine driving performance, but certain physical, functional, and cognitive changes are more common in advancing age and can impact on driving safely.

Monitoring personal health, adjusting driving patterns, and incorporating other transportation options, are proven ways to age gracefully with positive mobility.

Health, Aging, & Driving Fitness?

Older drivers are generally safe when behind the wheel, in part because of their decades of on-road experience. Most adjust well to common changes in visual acuity, physical stamina, and other minor functional concerns that often accompany advancing age.

A minority of older drivers – perhaps 10-20% – experience more significant health and functional challenges. These may include loss of sensation (e.g., from peripheral neuropathy), reduced range of motion (e.g., from arthritis), and changes in memory and thinking skills (e.g., from dementia). Such individuals may need to retire from driving soon or in the future.

It is common for older adults to have many prescriptions. Drug interactions and side effects (e.g., drowsiness) can also impact negatively on driving.

Other Ways to Get Around

Family and friends: For many, family and friends are the first alternative drivers, for reasons of ease and familiarity. However, friends and family can't always accommodate all of their loved ones' needs, whether due to time, money, accessibility, or other constraints.



Taxis or car services: These offer flexible scheduling and can actually be cheaper than owning and maintaining a car. Some car services may be willing to set up accounts for relatives to pay for services.

Demand-responsive services, private programs or other local services: Demand-responsive services such as Dial-a-Ride or elderly and disabled transportation services offer door-to-door services by appointment. These are often government-subsidized and are available at reasonable fees. Types of destinations may be limited to medical or grocery shopping purposes. Private program services may be available from adult day centers, assisted living facilities, malls or stores. Other local programs, often sponsored by faith-based or non-profit organizations, provide older adults transportation for donations or nominal fees.

To view an up-to-date list of public transit services in Maine, visit the QR code below



Find more information at <https://www.maine.gov/dps/bhs/>

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Information for Mature Drivers

How to Prepare & Adapt For Drivers

Maine takes health and aging into account in driver licensing. For example, drivers aged 62 or older must take and pass a vision test at each renewal.

The main components of vision required for safe driving include sufficient visual acuity and peripheral vision. In some circumstances, an ocular defect or disease may not cause the driver to fail the eye examination, however, their examining clinician advises the condition may cause risk to driver fitness. In this type of scenario, a road test with a BMV Driver License Examiner may be recommended to evaluate particular driving skills.

A person's license may be suspended if they fail to submit to examination, which may include a physical exam, vision test, written driver's test, or submission of medical reports from a licensed clinician.

It is important to begin talking about safe driving in general long before difficulties are noticed.

Ultimately, it is a person's driving performance, not age, that should determine fitness to drive.

Older drivers should be proactive about being safe drivers. By accurately assessing age-related changes, drivers can adjust their driving habits to remain safe on the road or choose other kinds of transportation.

Common medical conditions that affect older drivers:

Alzheimer's Dementia	Arthritis	Cardiovascular Disease	Cataracts Glaucoma Macular Degeneration
Diabetes	Parkinson's	Sleep Apnea	Stroke

How to Prepare & Adapt For Families & Caretakers

Talking with an older person about their driving may be difficult, especially if the older person fears – sometimes accurately – that their car keys may be taken away. But you can make these conversations easier and more productive.

Start the conversation before it's necessary

- > Begin talking about maintaining safe driving practices before you are worried.

Monitor the person's driving skills

- > Observe the person driving at different times of day and weather conditions. Do they obey traffic laws?
- > Take note of memory changes, mobility issues, and even changes in medication, that may impact their driving.

When changes are needed

- > Older adult drivers should be deeply involved in every step of their transportation planning and implementation process.
- > Respect the older person's opinions and needs, and express your genuine concern for their safety and autonomy
- > Review the driver's habits at least twice a year to ensure that they're still being safe.
- > Changes in a person's abilities or even interests can mean that adjustments need to be made to the older person's action plan so that he or she can get around the community safely.

How to Prepare & Adapt Creating an Action Plan

An action plan is created to ensure that the older person can remain mobile in and around the community, allowing them to stay connected to the people, places, and activities that give their life meaning.

The focus of an action plan should be to:

- > Enhance the independence and decision-making of the older adult
- > Maximize community safety

An action plan should be tailored to the individual. While one might call for the older adult to get assessed by a driving rehabilitation specialist, another might include finding ways for the driver to get to events with assistance.

For drivers who are able and still wish to drive on their own:

- > Ask the local Area on Aging for learning opportunities.
- > Places like AAA and AARP offer mature driving classes to maintain driving skills.
- > Driver Rehabilitation Specialists can assess drivers and determine if they're still able to drive safely, as well as offering options on how to adapt a vehicle to make driving safer and easier for older drivers.

Please note that adapting vehicles can be expensive.

