

SENIOR *Lifestyles*



Older motorists can take steps to drive safely

Gradual at first, the aging process accelerates as years go by. After age 55, changes occur more rapidly. And, by age 60, those changes begin to affect driving performance.

Meeting the Challenge

Effects of aging vary from person to person. But few older drivers have reflexes as sharp as those of a 25 year old. Frequently mentioned descriptions of problems with older drivers include:

- Maintaining proper speed or slowing unexpectedly.
- Failing to check mirrors and other lanes.

• Demonstrating uncertainty in unfamiliar areas.

• Inability to make decisions and react as quickly as other drivers.

• Having energy and physical freedom to cope with and resolve conflicts.

• Recognizing new traffic signs, signals and road markings and adjusting to different traffic patterns and roadway designs.

But older drivers have one great advantage: experience. The longer you drive, the more you learn about what to do - and what not to do - on the road. What you lack in quick reflexes, you can make up

in sound judgment.

Resources other than sound judgment also can help keep older drivers on the road - and driving safely.

What's Up Doc?

Physical problems that interfere with driving ability should be reported to your doctor. Hearing aids and eye glasses can help compensate for hearing loss or weakened vision. Your doctor might also suggest treatment for other ailments that are associated with aging like muscle fatigue and depression.

Older drivers especially should be alert for signs of fatigue and depression. For example, recent loss of a spouse can leave you distracted and careless. Avoid peak travel hours and consider asking others to drive you during the initial period of grief.

Older drivers also should get plenty of rest before driving long distances and take frequent breaks during trips. Also avoid driving immediately after extended and intensive use of your eyes.

Improving Flexibility

According to research findings, exercise is the best way to fight fatigue, depression and loss of mobility - at any age.

After age 30, sedentary people lose their ability to do physical activity more quickly than those who exercise regularly. Exercise can slow the aging process - and improve driving skills.

Effective exercise programs strengthen heart, lungs and muscles and loosen joints. Many communities offer structured programs for older people, or you can exercise at home. A regular program of walking is one way to tune up your body and improve

overall physical - and mental - fitness.

Other exercises are specifically designed to improve flexibility and posture, reduce muscle tension and increase freedom to movement.

Picking the Right Route

Carefully selecting driving routes also can improve performance on the highway. Older drivers should choose routes that provide ample lighting, well-marked streets, easy-to-read signs and easy-to-reach parking places. Also look for roads less traveled - where traffic is light during off-peak hours.

Older drivers often avoid interstates and freeways, which generally are the country's safest roadways. But it is better to avoid these roads than to drive where you are tense and uncomfortable.

Re-learning to Drive

Many communities offer driver improvement courses for people over age 50. Most courses update drivers on current driving laws. Some even provide hands-on training in safe driving techniques.

Contact your state motor vehicle department for a copy of the state driver's manual. Some MVDs keep lists of approved driver-improvement courses, and others provide materials on re-examination. Many also conduct programs designed specifically for older drivers.

At least 30 states offer insurance discounts or reduce infraction points for those completing state-sanctioned driving courses.

You can't stop the aging process. But you can use available resources—exercise, travel planning and driver-improvement courses—to improve driving skills and maintain driving privileges.

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