

Driving safely as you age



Meet Marie-Claude...

Marie-Claude has just celebrated her 68th birthday. She has lived with diabetes for ten years and is finding it increasingly difficult to control her blood sugar level. Marie-Claude has heard that diabetes can pose risks when driving. She is now wondering:

Should I continue driving?

Having diabetes does not necessarily mean you should not drive. It does mean you should be aware of how diabetes might affect your driving.



How might diabetes affect safe driving?

The effects of diabetes are different for each person. Some effects of this disease may interfere with your ability to drive. For example:

- **Blood sugar levels:** Varying blood sugar levels may make you feel sleepy, dizzy, confused, and less alert. Low blood sugar levels may result in seizure or loss of consciousness.
- **Vision:** You may experience blurred vision or a sudden loss of vision. Diabetic retinopathy can cause you to see dark spots in your visual field.
- **Sensory:** Nerve damage may cause pain or loss of feeling in your hands, legs, and feet.





Warning signs of unsafe driving

- You have difficulty staying alert and oriented.
- You have difficulty operating the gas pedal or brake due to pain or loss of feeling in feet.
- You have difficulty fastening your seatbelt or operating controls.
- You have difficulty seeing objects or people.
- You have difficulty with vision at night or in poor weather.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to make some changes to your driving strategies or have your driving evaluated.



Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in some driving situations that are risky. Here are some strategies that can be used to reduce the risk:

Strategies to reduce the effect of diabetes on driving

- always carry your blood sugar meter
- always carry snacks
- assess your blood sugar level routinely
- have regular medical checkups and yearly eye examinations

Individuals who know their blood sugar levels have fewer motor vehicle violations, therefore fewer risky driving practices.

General strategies

- choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats
- make sure your vehicle is in good working condition
- make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirror are properly adjusted
- limit driving at night, in bad weather, during rush hour or on limited access highways
- be careful when changing lanes, making a left-hand turn or merging into traffic
- maintain a safe following distance
- take breaks if you are driving a long distance
- have regular medical checkups
- make sure you know how your medications might affect your ability to drive safely



Getting help

- an occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate your driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help you find alternative transportation
- a driver information session or refresher course may be useful for your driving



Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel safe to drive or you may be told that you can no longer drive. Here are some strategies to help you get where you want to go:

- plan ahead: planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving
- make a personal transportation plan:
 - collect information on local transportation options
 - check the blue pages or the Internet for local or regional transportation service providers and for government or community services for older adults that may offer transportation services
- become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options

Remember: Never be afraid to ask for help from family or friends.

Marie-Claude's decision

Armed with the information regarding diabetes and driving, Marie-Claude has scheduled a visit with her medical doctor and optometrist. She will ask for a referral to an occupational therapist for a driving assessment, and seek information about assessing her sugar levels. From these evaluations Marie-Claude feels that she can make an informed decision regarding her driving.

What strategies will you use?

RESOURCES



For more information

www.caot.ca

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists: www.caot.ca

American Occupational Therapy Association: www.aota.org

Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists: www.aded.net

Canadian Automobile Association: www.caa.ca

Canadian Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors

Seniors Canada: www.seniors.gc.ca

This information is also available in French, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Italian, and Punjabi.



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