

Driving safely as you age



Meet Ted...

Ted is 81 years old and is still driving. He was involved in a small collision in the past year. Ted is finding that driving is becoming increasingly stressful. He notices other drivers honk at him. Ted's family is concerned about his ability to drive safely. His family is asking:

Should he continue driving?

Many Canadian provinces have rules about when an older adult requires driver testing to continue driving. Check with the Motor Vehicle Licensing Board to learn more about driving regulations in your province.



How might age affect safe driving?

Age alone does not determine a person's ability to remain a safe driver. Many older adults continue to be safe drivers and make decisions to avoid driving situations in which they feel less confident. However, as we age, changes in abilities make some activities more difficult. It is important to recognize changes that can affect the ability to drive safely. For example, your family member may:

- **Vision:** notice glare and find it difficult to see in the dark, or see things in their peripheral vision
- **Physical:** feel weak, stiff, experience pain or move slowly
- **Cognition:** have difficulty remembering things, making decisions or coping with distractions
- **Reaction Time:** find it difficult to react quickly





Warning signs of unsafe driving

- Has your family member been involved in near or minor collisions?
- Do they seem distracted by the radio or passengers talking while driving?
- Do other drivers honk at them?
- Do they lack confidence when driving?
- Do they lose their way?
- Do they miss stop signs or traffic lights?
- Do they mix up gas and brake pedals?
- Do they have problems with lane changes or merging?
- Do passengers need to help them?
- Do family and friends refuse to get in the car with them?

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to encourage your family member to make some changes and have their driving evaluated.



Safe driving strategies

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

- choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats
- make sure the vehicle is in good working condition
- make sure the 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 driving a long distance
- have regular medical checkups
- make sure you know how medications might affect ability to drive safely



Strategies for family

When a person is unable to recognize or admit that his or her driving abilities are no longer safe, as family members and caregivers, you often have to take this issue into your hands. This can be a difficult task and you should prepare yourself ahead of time.

- seek support and information from others – family members, medical doctors, occupational therapists, certified driver rehabilitation specialists



- start the discussion when everyone is relaxed and there is enough time to talk
- observe your family member while driving
- keep a written record of unsafe driving behaviours over time
- don't leave your family member feeling abandoned
- offer alternatives and support
- you may need to take the keys if necessary

Getting help

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



Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel that your family member is safe to drive or they have been told that they can no longer drive. Here are some strategies to help:

- plan ahead: planning for driving retirement should begin before your family member stops 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 other family or friends.

Ted's family's decision:

Ted and his family have started to talk about alternative transportation. They have found a local community group who is able to take Ted to his appointments and social events and his family has offered to provide transportation for Ted's other needs. Ted has agreed to attend a driver refresher course. From the results of this training, he and his family will decide if he is able to drive safely on his own.

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

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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