Safe Driving Tips for Seniors

We often associate driving with independence. This is probably why many seniors are reluctant to give up the privilege of hitting the open road; they want to have the option of freedom and mobility. However, it’s also important that you’re staying safe when you’re behind the wheel.

Is It Time to Stop Driving?

It’s no secret that as we age our physical and mental capabilities can start to change. Even though getting older doesn’t necessarily equate to poor driving skills, it is important to understand how age-related factors and health conditions can impact your abilities every time you slip into the driver’s seat. Some of the reasons your safe driving skills may be hindered include:

- Physical Weakness and Flexibility. Stiff joints caused by arthritis can make it difficult to turn your head and check your blind spot for safe lane changes.
- Vision Changes. Certain eye conditions like cataracts, macular degeneration or glaucoma can affect older adults’ vision, making reading street signs, the speedometer and seeing pedestrians difficult. It can also take seniors’ eyes longer to shift focus from near to far, thus limiting their visibility.
- Hearing Changes. AAA reports that a third of Americans over the age of 65 have some age-related hearing loss, making it harder for them to hear sirens, car horns, or other motorists.
- Cognitive Problems. Our ability to process information as we get older slows down. This affects the ability to process, react, and make a safe judgment.
- Prescription drugs may have side effects that inhibit the ability to drive.

Stay Safe Behind the Wheel: 5 Senior Driving Tips

Just because you’re getting older, it does not mean that your driving should be compromised. Here are five driving tips you can keep in mind to not only retain your driving privileges but also to promote healthy aging overall.
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1. Stay Physically Active. Physical activity improves and promotes flexibility. This will not only allow you better mobility in your everyday life but also when you need to hop in the car and run errands. With increased flexibility, you will be able to turn the steering wheel without struggling and twist your head with more ease to check your blind spots when changing lanes. Stay active by joining daily fitness classes, like yoga and Tai Chi or water aerobics.

2. Schedule Regular Vision and Hearing Tests. As mentioned above, common age-related vision problems can make it difficult to see in general, but driving with these issues can be downright dangerous. Not being able to hear clearly can also make for compromised driving conditions because you’re unable to react as quickly to ambulance sirens, for example. Therefore, schedule an appointment with your physician and ask how often you should get your vision and hearing tested.

3. Manage Your Medications. As previously mentioned, prescription drugs can have some side effects that make driving dangerous. Some medications can result in drowsiness or dizziness and even state to not operate heavy machinery or drive while taking it. If you are unsure of the side effects of your current medications, be sure to consult your doctor or pharmacist.

4. Drive When the Roads are Safe. Roads can get dangerous quickly, especially in unfavorable weather conditions like snow or heavy rain. Additionally, driving at night can lower your visibility. A good rule of thumb is that if you have any hesitation in driving in such conditions, it is better to stay put and wait until the roads are safe.

5. Update Your Driving Skills. This is probably one of the most beneficial safe driving tips for seniors. Refresher courses are a great option for older drivers because it tests your reflexes, knowledge and overall motorist capabilities. In fact, through our innovative LivWell program, Crestwood even offers an AARP Safe Driving Course for residents.

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