

DRIVING & Older Adults



Most drivers monitor themselves and gradually limit or stop driving when they feel that certain situations or driving in general is not safe. However, some people fail to recognize declining abilities while others may resist hanging up the keys, fearing it will reduce their independence, socialization, and ability to participate in familiar activities. Conditions such as dementia or early stages of Alzheimer's disease may make some drivers unable to evaluate their driving properly.

The following steps and resources are useful whether you are concerned about your own driving or the driving abilities of another person.

Step 1: Assess the Situation

Read the "15 Warning Signs" box (next page) to identify areas of concern. It may help to have someone ride with you or to ride with the person about whom you are concerned to observe driving habits first hand.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- *Drivers 55 Plus: Check Your Own Performance*
- *Roadwise Review: A Tool to Help Seniors Drive Safely Longer*

Both are available at www.SeniorDrivers.org; click on "giving up keys" at the bottom of the page.

Step 2: Talk About It

As people age, they tend to look first to family members (spouse and children) for candid advice concerning their well-being and health issues. Have conversations early and often. Start the conversation

out of a sincere sense of caring for the person's well-being and base it on specific things you have observed.

HELPFUL RESOURCE

- *Family Conversations with Older Drivers*, available at www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers or by writing The Hartford, We Need to Talk, 200 Executive Blvd., Southington, CT 06489.

Step 3: Consider Your Options

There are many ways to address driving issues and concerns. The options you choose will depend on the type and degree of impairment. One size does not fit all, and, while no longer driving may be the only answer in some cases, stopping too early can cause a person's overall health to decline prematurely.

HELPFUL RESOURCES AND OPTIONS

- Take a classroom or on-line refresher course such as the AARP Driver Safety Program. For more information, call (888) 227-7669 or visit www.aarp.org/drive.
- For information on assessment of driving skills, education for continued safety, and planning for post-driving needs go to www.SeniorDrivers.org.
- For guidance on making adjustments to maximize comfort and control of a vehicle, read or download *CarFit: Helping Mature Drivers Find Their Perfect Fit* from www.SeniorDrivers.org; click on CarFit.



LIFE Senior Services

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- For information about memory loss and driving, order *At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia, and Driving* from www.thehartford.com/alzheimers/brochure.html or write to The Hartford, At the Crossroads, 200 Executive Blvd, Southington, CT 06489.
- Additional resources include: AARP's *Older Driver Skill Assessment and Resource Guide: Creating Mobility Choices* (D14957). Order from AARP Fulfillment, EE 01251, 601 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20049 and *Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully* from the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration, available at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/Driving20%20Safely20%Aging20%Web/index.html or Google Driving Safely while Aging Gracefully.
- For information on local resources see the Driving Assessments and Resources section on page 170.
- Encourage the driver to consider and gradually begin using other methods of transportation such as rides from family and friends, public transportation, paratransit services such as Tulsa Transit's Lift Program, taxis, or other public or private transportation options. See the Transportation Resources section on page 204. It may be helpful to accompany the person during initial trials of alternate forms of transportation.

Step 4: Seek Additional Help if Necessary

If the person is not taking proper action in response to your concern and the impairment is increasingly obvious, it may be necessary to involve the driver's doctor.

In Oklahoma, if you feel that a medical or vision problem may threaten personal or public safety, contact the Medical Desk at Oklahoma's Department of Public Safety, P.O. Box 11415, Oklahoma City, OK 73136 or call (405) 425-2424.

15 Warning Signs That You May Need to Hang Up Your Keys

1. Feeling uncomfortable, nervous, or fearful while driving
2. Dents and scrapes on the car or on fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs, etc.
3. Difficulty staying in the lane of travel
4. Getting lost
5. Trouble paying attention to signals, road signs, and pavement markings
6. Slower response to unexpected situations
7. Medical conditions or medications that may be affecting your ability to handle the car safely
8. Frequent "close calls" (e.g., almost crashing)
9. Trouble judging gaps in traffic at intersections and on highway entrance/exit ramps
10. Other drivers honking at you and instances when you are angry at other drivers
11. Friends or relatives not wanting to ride with you
12. Difficulty seeing the sides of the road when looking straight ahead
13. Easily distracted or having a hard time concentrating while driving
14. Difficulty turning around to check over your shoulder while backing up or changing lanes
15. Frequent traffic tickets or warnings by traffic or law enforcement officers in the last year or two

If you notice one or more of these warning signs, you may want to have your driving assessed by a professional or attend a driver refresher class. See the *Driving Assessments and Resources* section on page 170. You may also want to consult with your doctor if you are having unusual concentration or memory problems, or other physical symptoms that may be affecting your ability to drive. Source: AARP

