

Older Driver Safety



In 2008, there were more than 32 million drivers age 65 and older in the United States.

It is estimated that by 2020, that number will rise to more than 40 million licensed older drivers.

In New York State, there are more than 2 million licensed drivers age 65 or older. These older adults continue to drive so they can work, shop, keep appointments, enjoy life and stay independent.

Unfortunately, every year in New York State, more than 4,800 drivers over age 65 are seen in emergency departments, and more than 1,000 are injured severely enough to require hospitalization as a result of motor vehicle crashes. In addition, an average of 69 older drivers are killed in car crashes every year in New York State.

Older Drivers Are Safe Drivers

Many older drivers are very safe drivers. Older drivers are more likely than younger drivers to use a seat belt regularly and follow the rules of the road. Their years of experience in handling different road and traffic conditions are invaluable.

But there are ways that mature drivers can be even safer. Being careful about your health and taking simple precautions plays a big part in staying safe when driving.



A Healthy Body = A Safer Driver

As we age, changes in our physical and mental health can affect our ability to drive safely. Health conditions that affect vision or hearing, the use of hands and feet, and cognitive abilities may interfere with safe driving. These changes do not always mean it is time to stop driving. However, it is important to recognize the warning signs, compensate for them when possible and plan for the time when it is unsafe to continue driving.

Older drivers should follow a simple checklist to evaluate their health to make sure they are in the best condition for driving. Here are some things to consider before getting behind the wheel:



Vision

Regular eye exams are important, especially if you have certain medical conditions like diabetes. Eye exams can detect vision problems such as cataracts, glaucoma, glare sensitivity or need for a new glasses prescription. Wear your glasses if needed for driving and make sure they fit properly.



Medication

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist to see if your medications can affect your driving ability by causing you to become drowsy, dizzy, distracted or confused. Sometimes changing the time

of day a medication is taken can make driving safer. Never stop taking medication without talking to your doctor.



Hearing

Have routine hearing tests to make sure you can hear important traffic noises such as sirens and horns. If you use a hearing aid, always wear it when driving. Some medications can cause ringing in the ears, so talk to your doctor if you have any problems hearing.



Fitness

Activities like walking, dancing, gardening, golfing, or yoga can help you stay in shape to meet the physical demands of driving by keeping muscles strong and enhancing flexibility and coordination.



Cognition

Keep your mind sharp to help you make quick decisions while driving. Tell your doctor or a close family member if you become confused or anxious while driving.



Important Driving Tips for Older Drivers

Older drivers can follow these tips to improve their safety on the road:

- Take a driver safety course. Many local agencies and national organizations offer classes for a small fee.
- Plan your route before driving. Think about confusing intersections or other areas where you may find a difficult driving situation. Map out a route that makes you feel most comfortable.

- Adjust your car to better fit your body. Raise the seat, tilt the steering wheel and/or adjust the mirrors to make driving more comfortable and less physically demanding. Look for programs that assist drivers with vehicle adjustments, or speak with a driver rehabilitation specialist.
- Minimize distractions while driving. Turn off the radio or ask passengers to stay quiet.
- Avoid stressful driving situations. Travel during the daytime, when the light is brightest. Stay off the roads during rush hour and when the weather is poor.
- Make sure you are in the best physical condition for driving. Being in good physical shape can help to increase your range of motion. A driver needs to be able to turn their neck and shoulders to look out side and rear windows to see traffic that may be in their blind spot.



For more information, additional resources and/or detailed guidance to address this issue, visit www.health.ny.gov or contact the New York State Department of Health Injury Prevention Program at **(518) 473-1143** or injury@health.state.ny.us

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