



KEEPING ON THE GO

Driving safely
as you age



Information for
older adults

Meet Linda...



Linda is 81 years old. She has started to notice difficulties with her vision when driving, especially at night. Linda also feels she has slower responses in driving situations and has less confidence in unfamiliar or busy environments. Last month, Linda's husband had a stroke and can no longer drive, making Linda the main driver in the family.

Linda is now wondering:
What can I do to continue to be a safe driver?

What can I do to continue to be a safe driver?

Canada's older adult population 65+ is continuing to grow and with the majority of aging Canadians wanting to stay in their communities as long as possible, the number and proportion of seniors who drive is expected to increase over the coming years.

How might age affect safe driving?

Age alone does not determine a person's ability to drive safely. Many older adults continue to be safe drivers and make decisions to avoid driving situations in which they feel less confident. However, as you age, changes in your abilities make some activities more difficult.

It is important to recognize changes that can affect your ability to drive safely. For example:

- > **Vision:** You may begin to notice glare and find it more difficult to see in the dark, to scan the environment, or to see things in your peripheral field of vision.
- > **Physical:** You may have limited range of motion, feel weak, stiff, experience pain or move slowly.
- > **Cognition:** You may have difficulty remembering things, making decisions or coping with distractions.
- > **Reaction time:** You may find it difficult to react quickly in stressful situations.

Warning signs of unsafe driving

- > You lose your way.
- > You have less confidence in your driving skills.
- > You notice other drivers honk at you.
- > You miss stop signs or traffic lights.
- > You mix up the gas and brake pedals.
- > You have problems with lane changes or merging.

- > You have minor accidents or traffic tickets.
- > Your passenger needs to help you.
- > Family and friends refuse to get in the car with you.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, it may be time to make some changes to your driving strategies and have your driving evaluated.

Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in risky driving situations.

Older drivers may recognize and avoid situations where they do not feel confident in their ability to drive safely. For example, they may avoid driving after dark, in heavy traffic, or in bad weather. If you are feeling less confident in your ability to drive, you should speak to a doctor to discuss strategies that are appropriate for you.



For more information

Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists: www.aded.net

Canada's Road Safety Strategy: <https://roadsafetystrategy.ca/en/strategy>

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
www.caot.ca

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists – CarFit Program
<https://caot.ca/site/prac-res/carfit>

Canadian Automobile Association – Senior Drivers: <https://www.caa.ca/driving-safely/senior-drivers/>

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PHAC wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists in the production of this brochure.

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Cat.: HP25-14/1-2025E-PDF / HP25-14/1-2025E (Print)
ISBN: 978-0-660-78492-2 (PDF) / 978-0-660-78493-9 (Print)
Pub.: 250190

General strategies

The following general strategies can be used to reduce risks:

- › 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 mirrors are properly adjusted.
- › Limit driving at times you feel less confident. This could be at night, in the rain or bad weather, during rush hour, on highways or isolated roads.
- › Be careful when changing lanes, making left-hand turns or merging into traffic.
- › Choose a parking lot or space where it is easier to park.
- › Maintain a safe following distance.
- › Take breaks every few hours if you are driving a long distance.

- › Have regular health checkups.
- › Make sure you know how your medications might affect your ability to drive safely.

You can also seek support and information from others, including family members, medical doctors, occupational therapists, certified driver rehabilitation specialists.

- › An occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate your driving ability, develop programs to improve safe driving habits, or help you find alternative transportation.
- › A driver information session or refresher course may be useful.

Remember:

Don't hesitate to ask for help from family, friends or neighbours.

Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel that you are safe to drive or you have been told that you can no longer drive. Before that time comes, make a personal transportation plan. Planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving. Here are some strategies to help:

- › Become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options in your community.
- › Collect information on local transportation options.
- › Check the Internet or contact your municipal government to learn more about transportation services in your area.

Linda's decision

Linda still believes that she is a safe driver, but recognizes that there are some situations that are more risky than others. She has decided to avoid situations such as driving in heavy traffic, in bad weather, and at night. She will also look for a driver information session in her community to learn more about safe driving.

What strategies will you use?

