



KEEPING ON THE GO

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 now wondering:
Should he continue driving?

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

Warning signs of unsafe driving

Your family member:

- > Has been involved in near or minor collisions.
- > Seems distracted by the radio or passengers talking while driving.
- > Is honked at by other drivers.
- > Lacks confidence when driving.
- > Loses their way, forgets familiar routes.
- > Misses stop signs or traffic lights.
- > Mixes up the gas and brake pedals.
- > Has problems with lane changes or merging.
- > Needs passengers to help.
- > Has had family and friends refuse to get in the car with them.

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

Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in risky driving situations. Here are some strategies to share with your family member to help reduce the risk:

- > Choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with an automatic transmission or power options like adjustable seats.
- > Make sure the vehicle is in good working condition.
- > Make sure the 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.
- > Maintain a safe following distance.
- > Choose a parking lot or space where it is easier to park.
- > Take breaks every few hours when driving a long distance.
- > Have regular medical checkups.
- > Know how medications might affect ability to drive safely.

Many Canadian provinces and territories have rules about when an older adult requires driver testing to continue driving. Check with the motor vehicle licensing board in your province or territory to learn more about driving regulations where you live.



Information for families
of older adult drivers



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/>

The information in this brochure is intended for educational purpose only. It does not and should not replace the advice or treatment from a health professional. Never disregard professional health advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this brochure.

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Également disponible en français sous le titre: *Rester en mouvement : Conduire en toute sécurité en vieillissant - Informations à l'intention des familles des conducteurs âgés*

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Strategies for family

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

- › Start the discussion when everyone is relaxed and there is enough time to talk.
- › Observe your family member while they are driving.
- › Keep a written record of unsafe driving behaviours over time.
- › Don't leave your family member feeling abandoned.
- › Offer alternatives and support.
- › Be prepared to take the keys or disconnect the car battery cable if necessary.

You can also encourage the older person to seek support and information from other family members, medical doctors, occupational therapists, certified driver rehabilitation specialists.

- › An occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate driving ability, develop programs to improve safe driving habits, or help 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 your family member is safe to drive or this person has been told that he or she can no longer drive. Before that time comes, you can help your family member make a personal transportation plan. Planning for driving retirement should begin before your family member stops 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.

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?

