



SENIOR SERVICES
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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ELDER CARE CHOICES

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OLDER ADULTS AND DRIVING

As a person ages, there are many factors that can affect an individual's ability to drive safely.

- Vision changes
- Hearing loss
- Reduced mobility, strength and flexibility
- Slower reaction time

There are also cognitive changes that can occur as one ages. Dementia from a stroke, brain injury or disease, Alzheimer's disease or other diseases or illnesses can drastically affect one's ability to drive safely. **However, normal aging does not necessarily mean giving up driving. It may just mean that it is time to make some changes as to how one drives.**

Adjustments can be made to the car itself to increase safety while driving. For example, mirror extenders can be attached for better viewing of vehicles approaching from the rear, seat cushions can be used to raise the driver higher behind the wheel and pedal extenders can be installed for more comfort when driving.

As vision changes and mobility issues occur, it may be safer to limit driving to daylight hours and for short distances. It may be safer to only travel on familiar roads and when the weather is good. Following these changes will help keep the older driver independent and yet safe behind the wheel.

Exercise is a great way to maintain one's maximum flexibility and allow for more efficient movement while driving. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program. Also, consider the following as additional ways to stay safe behind the wheel:

- Regular health check-ups may identify potential health risks
- Enroll in a driving refresher course to review some of the techniques used in driving

No Longer Safe To Drive

While making some adjustments to driving may help the older adult maintain his/her independence longer, the time may come when it is too dangerous to drive. Here are several questions to ask if safe driving is becoming a concern:

- Do you sometimes come too close to other vehicles?
- Do other drivers honk at you a lot?
- Have you ever been lost in a familiar neighborhood?
- Do you have difficulty braking?
- Have friends, relatives, or passengers ever said that your driving makes them nervous?
- Do you sometimes change lanes in a way that interferes with other drivers?
- Do you often become angry or frustrated when driving?

It is very important that caregivers begin to wean their loved one away from the automobile slowly if the older adult does not take steps to do so him/herself. To make the transition easier on everyone, it is important to introduce both public transportation and informal transportation options before the older adult loses the ability to drive.

Most cities have public transportation available for older adults. Generally, these resources can provide transportation to any location the older adult desires to visit. However, there may occasionally be limitations that make using this resource difficult for the elderly. For example, the transit service may not serve the area in which the individual lives or may not go to a location the person wishes to visit. In addition, the service may be difficult for the older adult to use if he/she has a mobility problem.

Informal transportation resources may also be available. When considering informal transportation such as a neighbor, friend, family member or a volunteer organization, some questions will help identify potential problems.

- Is the transportation available when needed?
- Is it accessible if the older adult has a mobility problem?
- Will there be a charge or donation?

Having a plan ready that will accommodate the older adult's daily schedule as closely as possible may make the transition to other modes of transportation easier. For more information about our local formal and informal transportation resources, please call Senior Services' Help Line at 336-724-2040.