

For information on
AAA's Safe Driving
for Mature Operators
Driver Improvement Program,
contact your local AAA club.

STRAIGHT TALK for **Mature Drivers**

AAA's Mature Drivers series:

- ▼ Meeting the Challenge
- ▼ Buying a Vehicle
- ▼ Good Vision ...
Vital to Good Driving
- ▼ Maintaining Your Vehicle
- ▼ Rx for Safe Driving



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STRAIGHT TALK for **Mature Drivers**

Meeting the Challenge



Age Is a Risk We Can Minimize

Rush hour ... rude drivers ... road construction. These “three R’s” make driving stressful for everyone, especially those of us who have been driving since vehicles had fins. By 2020, 50 million Americans will be 65 or older — and most will still be driving.

As you age, sight, hearing, judgment of speed and distance and reflexes diminish. These abilities change gradually, so you may not notice the impact on your driving until you are in a crash.

The good news is that you may be able to compensate for the effects of aging. Mature drivers can minimize their risks on the road through physical conditioning, travel planning, defensive driving and choosing a vehicle that meets their needs.



Feeling Better Behind the Wheel

Overall well-being contributes to your performance as a driver. Mature drivers are more likely to have impaired hearing, reduced vision and slower reflexes. Other health factors that affect driving include ankle rigidity, wrist pain or weakness and decreased range of motion.

Good eyesight is critical to safe driving, because nearly 90 percent of the information drivers need is visual. Vision problems common to mature drivers include cataracts, glaucoma and night blindness.

Talk with your doctor about any medical conditions that may interfere with your driving and for suggestions to help minimize risk if you continue to drive. For example, exercise is a proven fatigue-fighter that also combats loss of mobility. A program as mild as regular walks can strengthen your heart, lungs and muscles and increase your flexibility and range of motion.

Be sure you understand how medications and drug and/or alcohol interactions can affect you. Even over-the-counter drugs can make you drowsy, slow reaction time, diminish concentration, blur your vision and impair your mobility. Ask your doctor or pharmacist how taking specific medications or combinations of medicines could affect your driving.

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Risks for Mature Drivers

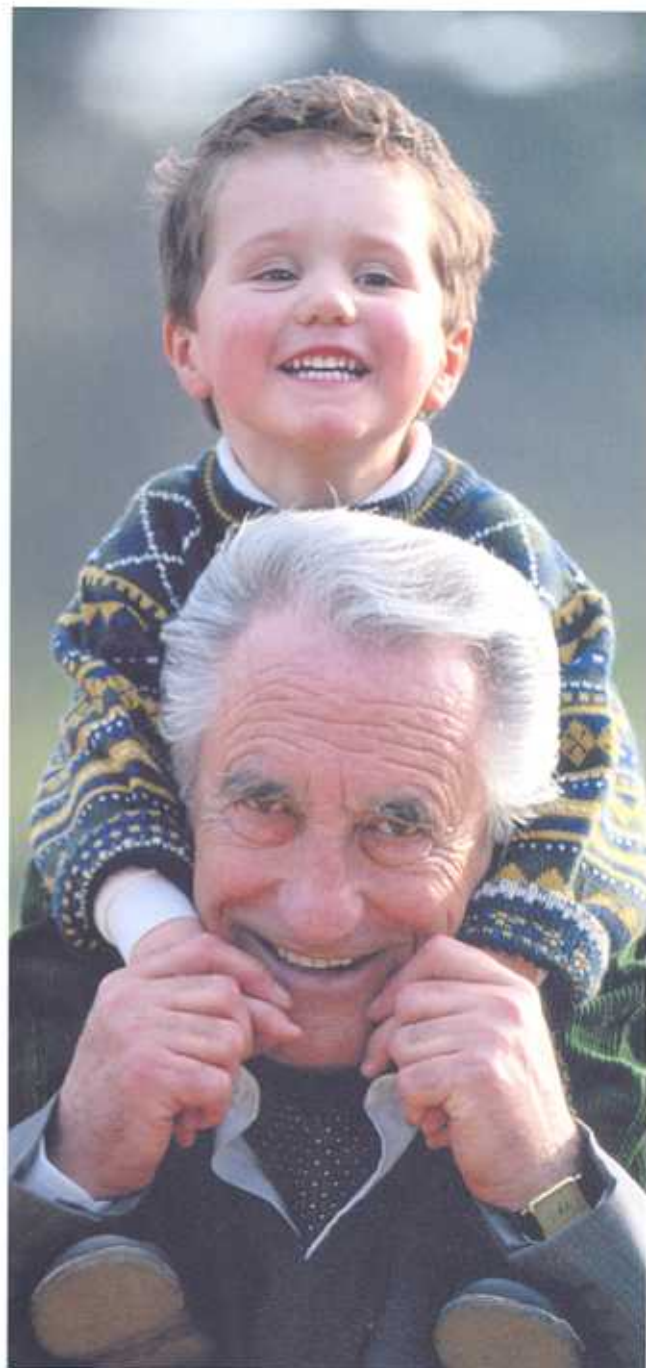
Some difficult tasks for senior drivers may include:

- ▼ Yielding right-of-way.
- ▼ Making left turns.
- ▼ Driving in heavy traffic.
- ▼ Backing a vehicle.
- ▼ Maintaining proper speed.
- ▼ Responding to new traffic signs, signals, road markings or different traffic patterns and roadway designs.

Fine-Tune Your Driving Habits

Five pointers that will help protect all drivers:

- ▼ Move into an intersection only when you have checked the area for pedestrians, cyclists, hazards and any motor vehicles — don't allow other drivers to pressure you into sudden moves.
- ▼ Limit conversation and keep the radio volume low to reduce potential sources of distractions.
- ▼ Ensure your windshield is clean and visibility is clear. Don't smoke in the vehicle — smoking leaves a film on your windshield that may interfere with visibility.
- ▼ Don't drive when you are tired, depressed or in the grips of a strong emotion.
- ▼ Never drink and drive. As your metabolism changes with age, even one drink can impair your ability to drive.



Exercise, defensive driving and careful choice of automobiles can help seniors compensate for the effects of aging on driving skills.

Planning Makes Driving Safer

Experience counts. What you may lack in quick reflexes, you may be able to compensate for in sound judgment. Maturity and foresight can help you minimize risk by making simple adjustments to your driving habits.



Tips for Staying Safer on the Road

- ▼ Time your trip for daylight driving, avoiding rush-hour traffic, storms and adverse conditions.
- ▼ Choose routes with well-marked, well-lit streets and easy-to-reach parking places.
- ▼ Avoid making difficult left turns such as intersections with no traffic signal.
- ▼ Note landmarks and exits that will help you navigate.
- ▼ Turn on your headlights and fasten your seat belt — even for quick trips.
- ▼ Sit up straight and adjust your seat so the top of your steering wheel is shoulder high. Adjust seats and mirrors for the best visibility.
- ▼ Drive at the posted speed limit. If you must drive slower than other vehicles on the road, stay in the right lane.
- ▼ Drive defensively and yield the right-of-way.
- ▼ In good weather, leave at least three seconds of space between you and the car ahead of you. In bad weather, double your following distance.
- ▼ Stay in the appropriate lane. Do not weave from lane to lane, straddle two lanes or change lanes near intersections.
- ▼ Use turn signals to help other drivers plan for your actions. Remember to cancel the signal if it doesn't automatically shut off.
- ▼ Take a break after every 90 minutes of driving. Get out of the vehicle and stretch to help relieve stiffness and fatigue.

Safer Vehicles for Safer Drivers

You have probably already replaced that racy little sports car with a vehicle that offers reliability and a little more leg room. Mature drivers should choose a vehicle with options that help offset loss of strength or visibility, such as:

- ▼ Power steering.
- ▼ Power, anti-lock brakes.
- ▼ Automatic transmission.
- ▼ Adjustable seats and steering wheel.
- ▼ Dual front air bags.
- ▼ Daytime running lights.
- ▼ Untinted windshields.
- ▼ Adaptive equipment such as hand controls.

Whatever you drive, keep your vehicle in good operating condition. Before each trip, check windshield wipers and make sure headlights, taillights, windshield and rear window are clean and clear.

Cell Phones and Driving

Distracted driving — including the use of cell phones, among other activities — contributes to thousands of automobile crashes each year. However, carrying a cell phone with you while traveling can provide an extra measure of security in the event of a breakdown or other roadside emergency. Pre-program the cell phone with “911” and AAA’s toll-free roadside assistance number: (800) AAA-HELP.



Refine Your Skills

A refresher course is a good investment. Most communities offer courses to update drivers on defensive tactics and may include hands-on experience. State motor vehicle departments provide lists of approved courses.

In at least 30 states, you become eligible for insurance discounts or reduced infraction points after completing certified driving courses, such as AAA’s Safe Driving for Mature Operator Driver Improvement Program.

For information about AAA’s Safe Driving for Mature Operators courses, contact your local AAA club or visit www.aaapublicaffairs.com. The National Safety Council and the American Association of Retired Persons also provide driver improvement courses.

Is It Time to Stop Driving?

No one wants to give up the freedom and convenience of driving. Mature Americans prefer private vehicles over all other forms of transportation. Drivers 65 and older take more than 80 percent of trips in their own vehicles.

If you are unsure of your performance, discuss the issue with a trusted friend or family member. Your physician may refer you to a driver rehabilitation specialist or other health professional who can assess your ability to drive.

The decision to stop driving is a tough one, but most of us want to make a responsible choice to protect ourselves and others.

In the past few months, have you:

- ▼ Suffered a stroke, heart attack or diminished eyesight?
- ▼ Experienced difficulty in negotiating sharp turns and intersections?
- ▼ Hesitated over right-of-way decisions or situations you once took for granted?
- ▼ Been surprised by the sudden presence of other vehicles or pedestrians?
- ▼ Received negative feedback from other drivers?
- ▼ Become lost on familiar routes?
- ▼ Felt nervous or exhausted after driving?
- ▼ Been cited for traffic violations or found at fault in crashes?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, it may be time to consider moving from the driver's seat to the passenger seat.



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