



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**

Rx for Safe Driving



Impaired May Not Mean Drunk

A driver over 65 is likely to take the “never drink and drive” rule to heart. Mature drivers and pedestrians who are killed in crashes have the lowest intoxication levels of all adult traffic fatalities.

Unfortunately, alcohol is only one drug that impairs drivers. Mature drivers are the most likely to drive while taking multiple medications.

Both prescription and over-the-counter medications can slow reflexes, blur vision and cause drowsiness or dizziness. Cough syrups or pain relievers may have unexpected side effects or interact with other drugs or food.

Drugs typically affect people differently at 60 than at 20. With age, people tend to gain weight and lose muscle tone, which changes the way chemicals are absorbed. A mature body also can take longer to rid itself of drugs.

How a drug will affect an individual is difficult to predict — the decongestant that eases your breathing may give someone else dizzy spells.



Combinations Can Be Bad Medicine

Drugs create chemical changes in your body. However, the changes may not be limited to the relief you were seeking. And they may affect your ability to drive a car safely.

Let's say you routinely take a diuretic to control high blood pressure. One day, a sinus headache makes you reach for an over-the-counter antihistamine. You don't realize the active ingredient in the cold medicine may raise your blood pressure ... perhaps to a dangerous level.

In addition, combinations of some medicines and foods can negatively affect your health. For example, eating aged cheese such as cheddar while taking certain antidepressants can speed up your heart, elevate your blood pressure and bring on nosebleeds.

A food-drug interaction can create a reaction as harmless as a mild headache or as serious as a stroke. Read the literature on side effects and drug interactions supplied with all prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs, or consult your pharmacist.

None of the information in this pamphlet is intended to replace the advice of health-care professionals. Readers are urged to discuss all issues related to medication with their doctor or pharmacist.

Drugs That Affect Driving

Common drugs that affect driving include:

- ▼ Benzodiazepines for anxiety or insomnia.
- ▼ Insulin for diabetes.
- ▼ Antispasmodics for ulcers.
- ▼ Pain medicines and some anti-inflammatories.
- ▼ Some high blood pressure medications and diuretics.
- ▼ Antibiotics for infections.
- ▼ Antihistamines for allergies.
- ▼ Cardiac glycosides for congestive heart failure.
- ▼ Antidepressants.

Going My Way

Taking medication doesn't mean you can't drive ... it just means there's more planning involved in driving responsibly. Protect your health and safety by following these guidelines:

- ▼ Avoid driving if you're not sure how a drug will affect you. Consider a taxi or other transportation service.
- ▼ Take medications in the correct dosage at prescribed intervals.
- ▼ Plan driving in accordance with dosages or when side effects are less likely.
- ▼ If you are prescribed a new medication, do not drive until you know how your body reacts to the medicine.
- ▼ Do not drive when you feel ill, tired or disoriented.
- ▼ Never drink and drive, and never combine medication and alcohol.



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Take Your Medicine — The Right Way

Consumers are demanding details about products they use — and that's a healthy trend for anyone filling a prescription. Here are some things to remember when taking medicines:

- ▼ Make sure you understand dosage instructions. Does “three times daily” mean every eight hours, or as needed but not to exceed three dosages? Can the drug be taken on an empty stomach, or should it be taken with meals?
- ▼ If your medicine is liquid, pour an exact dosage. If you have trouble measuring accurately, get help.
- ▼ Don't assume it's OK to crush pills or mix medicine into food or drink. This may break down chemicals and affect the way the drug works.
- ▼ Swallow a pill with a full glass of water on hand, to help you dislodge the pill if it catches in your throat.

Don't Assume It's Harmless

Just because something is touted as “natural” or “drug-free” doesn't mean it's harmless. Herbal supplements and homeopathic remedies can produce side effects and interact with foods and drugs.

In addition, the amount of active ingredients in herbal and homeopathic remedies is not standardized. Never assume every brand will make you feel the same way.

Heed the Fine Print

The Food and Drug Administration requires pharmaceutical companies to provide inserts with information on side effects, drug interactions and long-term complications. Ask your pharmacist to include inserts with each prescription, and take a few minutes to read through them.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about side effects and drug interactions related to your prescriptions. Also ask before taking any over-the-counter medication with a prescription drug.

Be sure to ask:

- ▼ Can you explain the dosage instructions?
- ▼ Is there anything I should know about how to take this drug — on an empty stomach? With meals?
- ▼ What are this drug's potential side effects?
- ▼ How could this medicine interact with other medications?
- ▼ Should I avoid any foods while taking this drug?
- ▼ Will I feel different at any time — for example, right before or after I take my prescription?
- ▼ Could this medicine aggravate food or drug allergies?
- ▼ Can I drive while taking this medicine?

Remember that aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen are drugs, too. They can change the effects of a prescription medication.

Put It In Writing

Maintain an up-to-date list of your prescriptions. Include brand names and dosages. Also note any food or drug allergies.

This will be a helpful reference when you talk to your doctor and pharmacist. In the event of a serious reaction to a drug, this information could help doctors make a fast, accurate diagnosis.

It's also a good idea to carry this list with you, in case of an emergency.



The Risk Is Growing

By 2020, there will be more than 40 million licensed drivers age 65 and older. Many of these drivers will be taking multiple prescription medications.

Analysts do not expect seniors to give up the keys to their vehicles. In fact, statistics show seniors are taking more trips than ever before — especially women. Miles driven by women age 65 and older are expected to increase by some 500 percent by 2020. Men in this age group are expected to increase their driving distances by some 465 percent.

In 1990, elderly drivers accounted for 6.7 percent of miles driven by all ages. According to conservative estimates, by 2030 this percentage will nearly triple to 18.9 percent.

Unfortunately, these increases also apply to the number of seniors who will be injured or die in vehicle crashes. Based on current rates, the number of traffic fatalities involving seniors will more than triple by the year 2030.

Even though mature drivers are less likely to drink and drive and more likely to wear safety belts, they have the highest fatality crash rate per mile of any age group except teenagers.

Mature drivers are most likely to be in crashes:

- ▼ On weekdays.
- ▼ During daylight hours.
- ▼ At intersections.
- ▼ With a second vehicle involved.
- ▼ In which a younger driver strikes the mature driver.

Your Doctor Can Help

People 65 and older are the fastest growing age group in the United States. And seniors are healthier than ever before. Hopefully, this means you'll enjoy driving your vehicle for many years to come.

To minimize your risks and ensure you stay safe behind the wheel for as many years as possible, talk to your health-care professional about the effects of medications and driving. Ask your doctor about the American Medical Association's *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers*. This guide is based on scientific evidence of driving impairment caused by various medical conditions and includes assessment strategies, rehabilitation options, counseling practices and additional resources for both you and your doctor.

Other Sources

- ▼ Contact your local AAA club or visit www.aaapublicaffairs.com to find out about AAA's "Lifelong Safe Mobility" public service initiative and its "Safe Driving for Mature Operators" driver improvement courses.
- ▼ The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety sponsors a special Web site — www.seniordrivers.org — for senior drivers and their families. The site includes an online quiz.
- ▼ Access the American Medical Association's Web site — www.ama-assn.org — for an online copy of *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers* and other helpful information.



Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about side effects and drug interactions related to your prescriptions.