



WE ALL EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CHANGES as we get older, even though they may be so gradual we barely notice them. Yet common changes like slower reaction time, night blindness, and pain and stiffness can have a big effect on our driving skills. You may even be aware of changes in your own driving but worry about losing your license if you share these concerns. Occupational therapy practitioners work with older adults to keep them driving safely for as long as possible despite age-related changes. If driving is no longer safe, they identify other ways to stay independent and active. The following tips were shared by occupational therapy practitioners to help older adults maintain the occupations (activities) of driving and community mobility.

If you want to:

Consider these activity tips:

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

Have a driver checkup, just as you get a checkup for you vehicle.

- Get a physical exam to identify changes that may affect your driving, and to see whether they are due to medication, nutrition, fitness levels, or other factors that could be addressed.
- Take a driving self-assessment, such as the one available through the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety at www.aaafoundation.org.
- Attend a free CarFit event in your community, during which experts will suggest ways to personalize your vehicle to be the best fit for visibility, comfort, and safety (see www.Car-Fit.org). They will *not* judge your driving ability.
- Keep walking, keep fit! The ability to walk a block gives *you* the widest choice of options as a driver, passenger, or pedestrian.

- Explore adaptations to overcome issues identified in a physical exam.
- Provide suggestions based on your particular skills and needs, such as driving only familiar routes, during daylight, and on side streets.
- Work with a team of professionals at CarFit events to help ensure that your vehicle is adjusted to be the best “fit” for you. CarFit events focus *only* on the vehicle fit and not on the person’s ability to drive.
- Address the *occupation* of driving with caregivers or volunteer drivers by sharing ways to simplify the process of helping passengers in and out of a vehicle, managing their mobility devices (walkers, scooters), and demonstrating other ways to keep them safe and comfortable.

Ensure your safety and the safety of others.

- Choose to drive only on familiar streets, during daylight hours, when traffic is light, when you are well rested, and with as few distractions as possible.
- Undergo a driving evaluation by an occupational therapist to determine what skills need to be addressed for you to continue or resume safe driving.
- Accept offers of rides, or ask friends or neighbors for rides when you are not comfortable driving (e.g., in bad weather, when feeling fatigued, after dark, in unfamiliar locations). Do not endanger yourself or others.
- Check local and state regulations for requirements for older drivers, such as more frequent vision checks or testing after a stroke or serious illness.

- Provide a comprehensive driving evaluation, which reviews all aspects of your driving. The goal of the evaluation is not to prove whether you are safe or unsafe, but to determine and address areas of concern to keep you driving safely for as long as possible.
- Suggest vehicle adaptations and equipment to address your specific needs, such as broader mirrors, seat boosters, hand controls, scooter lift, etc.

If you want to:

Continue to get around in the community if you can no longer drive safely.

Consider these activity tips:

- Offer to trade favors with family and friends in exchange for rides.
- Look into local taxi or limo services. Sometimes a contracted number of rides can be an economical option.
- Explore activities that don't require driving. Is there a clubhouse near your home where friends gather? A store that you have not previously considered?

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

- Determine whether you are able to use public transportation (e.g., can you walk to the stop, step up onto the bus, etc.)? If not, the occupational therapy practitioner will help you to gain these skills.
- Share information on grocery stores, places of worship, town halls, etc. that offer transportation or delivery services if public transportation is not an option for you.

Need More Information?

Contact an occupational therapy program to learn more about local resources and services to help you continue to drive safely or get around in your community. To find a driving rehabilitation specialist in your area, go to the Driver Safety section of AOTA's Web site at www.aota.org/Older-Driver.aspx.

You can find additional information through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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