

Older Adult Drivers

In 2012, there were almost 36 million licensed drivers ages 65 and older in the United States.¹ Driving helps older adults stay mobile and independent. But the risk of being injured or killed in a motor vehicle crash increases as you age. An average of 586 older adults are injured every day in crashes.² Thankfully, there are steps that older adults can take to stay safer on the roads.



Older adults can take several steps to stay safe on the road.

How big is the problem?

- In 2012, more than 5,560 older adults were killed and more than 214,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes. This amounts to 15 older adults killed and 586 injured in crashes on average every day.²
- There were almost 36 million licensed older drivers in 2012, which is a 34 percent increase from 1999.^{1,3}

Who is most at risk?

- Per mile traveled, fatal crash rates increase noticeably starting at ages 70-74 and are highest among drivers age 85 and older. This is largely due to increased susceptibility to injury and medical complications among older drivers rather than an increased tendency to get into crashes.⁴
- Age-related declines in vision and cognitive functioning (ability to reason and remember), as well as physical changes, may affect some older adults' driving abilities.⁵
- Across all age groups, males had substantially higher death rates than females.⁴

How can older driver deaths and injuries be prevented?

Existing protective factors that may help improve older drivers' safety include:

High incidence of seat belt use

More than three in every four (79%) older motor vehicle occupants (drivers and passengers) involved in fatal crashes were wearing seat belts at the time of the crash, compared to 66% for other adult occupants (18 to 64 years of age).⁶

Tendency to drive when conditions are the safest

Older drivers tend to limit their driving during bad weather and at night and drive fewer miles than younger drivers.⁷

Lower incidence of impaired driving

Older adult drivers are less likely to drink and drive than other adult drivers.⁸ Only 7% of older drivers involved in fatal crashes had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher, compared to 24% of drivers between the ages of 21 and 64 years.¹

Older adults can take several steps to stay safe on the road, including:

- Exercising regularly to increase strength and flexibility.
- Asking your doctor or pharmacist to review medicines—both prescription and over-the-counter—to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Having eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year. Wear glasses and corrective lenses as required.
- Driving during daylight and in good weather.
- Finding the safest route with well-lit streets, intersections with left turn arrows, and easy parking.
- Planning your route before you drive.
- Leaving a large following distance behind the car in front of you.
- Avoiding distractions in your car, such as listening to a loud radio, talking on your cell phone, texting, and eating.
- Considering potential alternatives to driving, such as riding with a friend or using public transit, that you can use to get around.

Resources for More Information

University of Michigan, Transportation Research Institute: Driving Decisions Workbook
(<http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/1321>)

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety: Senior Driver Web Site (<http://seniordriving.aaa.com/>)

AAA National: AAA Roadwise Review: A Tool to Help Seniors Drive Safely Longer
(<http://seniordriving.aaa.com/evaluate-your-driving-ability/interactive-driving-evaluation>)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: Active Aging Programs
(<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/>)

AARP: Driver Safety Program (http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/transportation/driver_safety/)

Community Transportation Association of America: Senior Transportation
(<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=18&z=40>)

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