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The information in this topic was provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Topic Last Reviewed: March 2015

Older Drivers

How Aging Affects Driving

As people get older, their driving patterns change. Retirement, different schedules, and new activities affect when and where they drive. Most older adults drive safely because they have a lot of experience behind the wheel. But when they are involved in crashes, they are often hurt more seriously than younger drivers. Age-related declines in vision, hearing, and other abilities, as well as certain health conditions and medications, can affect driving skills.



Changes in Driving Habits

When people retire, they no longer drive to work. With more leisure time, they may start new activities, visit friends and family more often, or take more vacations. Like drivers of any age, they use their vehicles to go shopping, do errands, and visit the doctor. Driving is an important part of staying independent.

Most people 70 and older have drivers' licenses. They tend to drive fewer miles than younger drivers. But, they are also keeping their licenses longer and driving more miles than in the past, often favoring local roads over highways. As the overall population ages, there will be more older drivers on the road.

A Complex Task

Driving is a complicated task. It requires people to see and hear clearly; pay close attention to other cars, traffic signs and signals, and pedestrians; and react quickly to events. Drivers must be able to accurately judge distances and speeds and monitor movement on both sides as well in front of them.



It's common for people to have declines in visual, thinking, or physical abilities as they get older. As a result, older drivers are more likely than younger ones to have trouble in certain situations, including making left turns, changing lanes, and navigating through intersections.

Common Mistakes

Common mistakes of older drivers include

- failing to yield the right of way
- failing to stay in lane
- misjudging the time or distance needed to turn in front of traffic
- failing to stop completely at a stop sign
- speeding or driving too slowly.

Older Drivers and Crashes

Driving errors can lead to traffic accidents, injuries, and death. The risk of crashes rises with age, especially after age 75. Studies show that older drivers are more, and less,

likely to be involved in certain types of crashes than other drivers. Older drivers are less likely to be involved in crashes related to alcohol use, speeding, and driving at night. But they are more likely to get into crashes.

- at intersections (usually in the vehicle that is struck)
- in which the front of one vehicle hits the side of another vehicle
- where the older driver is merging and the other vehicle is traveling faster or is in the older driver's blind spot



For recent statistics on the rate of injuries from crashes among older drivers, see [Traffic Safety Facts 2012: Older Population](#). (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

Crashes Down Among Older Drivers

Fortunately, the rate of crashes among adults 65 and over has decreased in recent years. Research suggests that this decline is due to a number of factors, including older adults' better health, safer cars, and safer roads. In addition, older drivers' ability to "police" themselves — like not driving at night — and stricter state laws for renewal of driver's licenses may help.

Most traffic deaths of older drivers occur during the daytime, on weekdays, and involve other vehicles. Older adults are more susceptible to death or serious injury in a crash if they are physically frail, but the good news is that older people are more likely to survive crashes than in the past.

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