

Mature Drivers

While some continue to drive safely well into their older years, studies show the crash rate per mile driven rises steadily for drivers age 55 and older. Getting older does not always mean a person's driving days are over; however, it's important to plan ahead and take steps to ensure the safety of your loved ones on the road.

Seven mature driving issues

1. Vision

According to the AAA Foundation for Highway Safety, as a person ages, it becomes more difficult to distinguish detail and the ability for the eyes to focus decreases. For example, a 60-year-old driver versus a teenager needs twice as much time for their eyes to adjust to changes in lighting and needs three times as much light to see properly. Drivers base 90 percent of decisions on what they see, making good vision imperative to safe driving.

What can you do?

- Get regular eye exams and always wear your glasses.
- Keep mirrors and windshields clean.
- Sit high enough to see the road. Use a seat cushion if necessary.
- Look to the lower right side of the road when there is oncoming traffic to avoid glare.
- Properly adjust side and rearview mirrors.



2. Physical fitness



Driving is physical activity. Strength, coordination and flexibility have an impact on the ability to safely control a vehicle, so stay active - mentally and physically.

What can you do?

- With your doctor's approval, do stretching exercises and a walking program.
- Sit at least 10 inches from the steering wheel to avoid being injured by the airbag.

3. Attention and reaction time

Driving requires dividing your attention between multiple activities and being able to react quickly to situations that often arise without warning.

What can you do?

- Drive during the day, avoid rush hour and plan your route before leaving.
- Keep a safe distance between you and the car ahead.
- Keep alert to sounds outside your car by limiting conversation and background noises.
- Watch for flashing lights of emergency vehicles in case you cannot hear distant sirens.
- Look to the sides of the road as well as directly ahead at all intersections.
- When possible, avoid driving during inclement weather.
- Obey the posted speed limit.

4. Medication

Some over-the-counter and prescription medications may cause you to become drowsy and lead to distracted driving.



What can you do?

- Talk to your doctor about your medications and the side effects.
- Read the labels for any warnings.
- Get another driver if your medication makes you drowsy or disoriented.

5. Keep alert to changes

Be aware of your body's changes and updates to traffic laws.

What can you do?

- Know your physical limitations and how they may affect your driving.
- Listen to what people you know tell you.
- Discuss driving with your doctor.
- Refresh your knowledge of safe driving practices and laws by taking a driver improvement course specifically designed for mature drivers.
- Begin planning for alternative ways of meeting your transportation needs.

6. Alternative transportation

Depending on where you live, there are often many ways of getting around town without having to use your own car. You may be surprised to find that any one of them is easier than driving and parking your own car.

What can you do?

- Learn what transportation services are available in your community (buses, taxi cabs, etc.).
- Check with your local [Area Agency on Aging](http://chfs.ky.gov/dail/AreaAgenciesonAging.htm) (chfs.ky.gov/dail/AreaAgenciesonAging.htm) for transportation services and benefits.
- Go with a friend who knows how to ride the bus or subway to make you feel more secure.

7. Self awareness: The key to safe driving!

While everyone wants to keep driving for as long as possible, no one wants to be a threat to themselves or to others. Be aware, and give up the keys if you can no longer drive safely.

For additional information:

- **AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety:** <https://seniordriving.aaa.com>
- **AARP 55 ALIVE Mature Driving:** www.aarp.org/55alive
- **ADED: Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists:** www.aded.net
- **American Occupational Therapy Association:** www.aota.org/older-driver
- **Kentucky Medical Review Board:** <https://drive.ky.gov>
- **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:** www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/older-drivers