



## **DRIVING SAFETY**

It's understandable that you want to stay mobile. You won't lose your driver's licence just because of your age! Everyone ages differently so all drivers need to be aware of changes which could affect their ability to be safe behind the wheel. Identifying changes as you age will help you compensate for them and learn to adjust your skills.

### **Did you know that as you get older:**

- Your depth perception declines and judging distance becomes increasingly difficult.
- You begin to lose the ability to process light, making night vision worse as well as increasing your sensitivity to sunlight/glare.
- By age 60 night time driving requires 3X the light that a 20 year old would.
- 1/3 of adults over 65 have hearing loss. It comes gradually and therefore makes it difficult to realize what you may be missing (horns, sirens, bicycles bells).
- Flexibility and response time decrease.
- You are more likely to be involved in multi-vehicle accidents and more likely to require hospitalization as a result than younger drivers in the same crash.

### **Warning Signs**

- Experiencing an increase in near collisions or being involved directly in minor collisions.
- Increase in traffic tickets or "warnings".
- Dents or scrapes on their vehicle, garage door, mailbox, fences or curbs.

- Misuse of turning signals or leaving signals on.
- Driving on wrong side of road, or driving on the shoulder.
- Missing highway exits or backing up to exit highway ramps.
- Confusing the pedals.
- Difficulty judging distance or seeing road signs and pedestrians. Or finding traffic signs and signals confusing.
- Stopping at green lights, in the middle of intersections or when there's no stop sign. Not stopping at red lights or stop signs.
- Getting lost or turned around on familiar roads.
- Lack of co-ordination between hand and foot movements.
- Vision problems, especially at night.
- Nervousness behind the wheel. Exhaustion or relief after driving.
- Family or friends expressing concern over your ability to drive.
- Lack of concentration.

### **Make Driving Safer**

- When taking new medications check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure the new drugs won't affect your ability to drive. Over-the-counter drugs as well as those you get by prescription can impair your ability to drive.
- Pain causes limited movement and interferes with your ability to concentrate. Avoid driving if you're experiencing pain. Let your doctor know if you're experiencing frequent, chronic or severe pain.
- Have your eyes and ears checked regularly. Over the years your depth perception and peripheral vision decline naturally. Be sure to wear your glasses or hearing aid.
- Let your doctor know if you're experiencing unexplained dizziness or fainting spells.

- Plan a route in advance. Try to use roads that are familiar to you. Avoid heavily traveled roads and rush hour traffic if these make you feel uncomfortable.
- Avoid extended periods behind the wheel.
- Wear your seatbelt.
- Drive in daylight if possible. It's more difficult to see at dusk and dawn, worse still after dark. Avoid driving in heavy rain, fog, snow and freezing rain. Use alternative methods like a taxi, a friend or a family member.
- Stay alert. Leave enough room between you and the vehicle ahead of you. Don't talk on your cell phone, smoke or eat behind the wheel.
- Keep noise to a minimum while in the vehicle. Radio and fan on low.
- Take a refresher course at a driving school. These courses are designed to help you sharpen your skills, regain your confidence, update you on technology and traffic laws, as well as identify and correct bad driving habits.

### **Approaching The Subject With A Loved One**

It is important to remember this is an extremely emotional issue. Driving is seen by almost everyone as a symbol of independence and freedom. Try to approach the subject with understanding.

It may be easier to negotiate with the driver rather than demand that they stop driving. For example: if it is a feasible option, suggest that the person drive only during daylight hours if, at this point, the difficulty seems to be night driving.

Remind the driver that safety is of utmost importance for everyone. Remind them of "close calls" or any previous accidents. This may reinforce your argument. Also, in reminding them of these incidents you may find that the driver also has concerns but may be reluctant to admit them without encouragement. Decide together that it is time to look for other options.

In this day and age, driving can be expensive as we all know. Using the financial benefits of not driving may also be useful. The cost of fuel is high and coupled with insurance, registration, licencing etc. using alternative methods of transportation may be financially beneficial.

If the driver's opinion is considered and they feel a part of the decision-making process, it may make a difficult process easier to bear.

### **If They Won't Give Up The Keys**

The driver's physician may assist you in your task and local police may speak with the driver reminding them of the importance of safety on the roads.

Unfortunately, if the driver refuses to give up the keys and driving is becoming dangerous for them and others on the road, physically taking the keys may be a last resort.

Disabling the vehicle is another option.

### **Life Without Driving**

While not being able to drive may seem like a loss of freedom, eventually a routine will emerge.

Family and friends can research options available in the area in which the senior lives, assist with pre-arranging rides to usual activities and assist in planning weekly schedules. Home delivery may be an option for some services such as prescriptions and groceries. Perhaps keeping the vehicle but having someone else drive when running errands etc. is an option.

Some people find that the ride is enjoyable when the stress of driving is eliminated. Encourage hobbies for the drive such as knitting or crosswords that can be enjoyed as a passenger.

### **Medication And Driving**

Driving does not come without responsibility. That responsibility includes managing your medication in such a way that you remain safe on the roads. The segment of drivers most rapidly growing is seniors and based on kilometers driven more collisions are reported involving this age group according to the Canadian Safety Council's website.

#### **How medication affects driving:**

- Treatment for anxiety (for example: Valium 10mgs) can impair a driver more than a blood alcohol concentration of 0.10. In Canada the Criminal Code limit on blood alcohol limit is 0.08.
- The side effects of benzodiazepines (which are prescribed for anxiety and insomnia) include: confusion, drowsiness and impaired motor

function.

- Painkillers containing codeine or propoxyphene can cause sedation and impairment and reduce your ability to rapidly process information and therefore make decisions quickly.
- Over-the-counter medications (which people rarely discuss with their doctor) can also cause drowsiness and poor concentration (antihistamines, cold pills or cough syrup).
- This raises the question of drug interactions. It is dangerous if multiple doctors are prescribing medications, a single doctor doesn't know about over-the-counter usage, or any combination of these situations.
- For seniors, alcohol is risky. As the body ages, the tolerance decreases and the body processes alcohol less efficiently. It is a powerful substance physically and psychologically. Alcohol in combination with medications is dangerous whether or not you will be behind the wheel, but you should definitely avoid it if you may be driving.
- Impaired driving does not just apply to alcohol impairment; it encompasses medication and combinations of the two. Impaired driving of any sort is a criminal offence.

### **Tips For Drivers On Medication:**

- Remember that herbal/alternative remedies and over-the-counter medications can impair your driving just as much as prescription medication.
- Follow your doctor's instructions when taking medication.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if the medication will affect your driving. Also ask if even a small amount of alcohol affects the way your medication will function.
- If you are prescribed medication from more than one doctor, be sure to tell them of other medication you may be taking.
- Don't mix or share your medication and don't drink alcohol.
- If you're not sure you should be driving or the medication says "Do not use while operating heavy machinery" choose not to get behind the wheel. Let someone else be the driver!