

2019 February Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Knowing When to Stop Driving!

For most older adults, driving is a key to independence. So how does an older driver, concerned family member, or friend know when it is time to stop and hang up the keys.? Chronological age alone does not determine if someone is capable of driving carefully. Changes in vision, hearing, reaction time, mental and physical health, and environmental awareness are factors. Driving is a demanding activity that requires one's full attention to many things at the same time. Potential risk factors are distractions inside and outside a car that take a driver's eyes off the road or take both hands off the wheel.

“The question of when it is time to limit or stop driving is not about age. It's about the ability of the driver.” Safely driving a vehicle requires physical and cognitive capabilities, driving skills and good driving behavior. AARP suggests the following are warning signs of unsafe driving:

- Delayed response to unexpected situations.
- Becoming easily distracted while driving.
- Decrease in confidence while driving.
- Having difficulty moving into or maintaining the correct lane of traffic.
- Hitting curbs when making right turns or backing up.
- Getting scrapes or dents on car, garage or mailbox.
- Having frequent close calls.
- Driving too fast or too slow for road conditions.

Clear indications when it is no longer safe to drive: Stopping at green lights or when there is no stop sign. Getting confused by traffic signals. Running stop signs or red lights. Having accidents or side-swiping other cars when parking. Getting lost and calling for directions. Hearing from friends who are concerned about a person's driving.

Assess your own driving skills: Ask yourself how is your attention and reaction time? Do you pay attention to changes in the driving environment? Can you process information quickly and accurately? Relying on a cell phone while driving is not going to do it! How is your memory? Can you figure out how to get from one place to another (e.g., to the grocery store or doctor's office)? Do you know what to do if the car has a flat tire or the engine doesn't start? Consider what effects a person's medications may have on driving skills.

Telltale signs signaling a decline in a person's driving abilities. **Their driving is dangerous** (ElderKind.com):

- Do they have difficulty in turning their head, neck, or body while driving or parking?
- They don't have enough strength to turn the wheel quickly in case of an emergency.
- Become angry and frustrated easily while driving.
- Do they fail to yield to pedestrians or motorists who have right of the way?
- Do they get lost in familiar neighborhoods?
- Do they find it difficult to drive with glare from oncoming vehicles, or other bright or shiny objects?
- Have they had one or more accidents or near misses recently?

Preparing for the conversation with [We Need to Talk](https://www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety/we-need-to-talk/), is a free online seminar developed jointly with the Hartford and MIT AgeLab. <https://www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety/we-need-to-talk/>
<https://www.caring.com/articles/when-to-stop-driving> <https://www.everydayhealth.com/senior-health/driving-safety.aspx>
<http://www.talk-early-talk-often.com/Senior-Drivers.html>