

# Knowing When to Put the Brakes on Elderly Drivers

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Safe driving is an issue for teenagers and adults alike; however, it becomes a larger concern as we enter our senior years. Everyone ages differently, and while some people may be perfectly capable of continuing to drive in their seventies and beyond, many seniors are at higher risk for road accidents. A person age 65 or older who is involved in a car accident is more likely to be seriously hurt, more likely to require hospitalization, and more likely to die than younger people involved in the same crash. In particular, fatal crash rates rise sharply after a driver has reached the age of 70.\*\*

If you know an elderly driver who is experiencing trouble on the road, it is important to carefully monitor the situation and watch for signs of unsafe driving. If you notice any warning signs, it is time for you to reassess the road risks that your loved one is faced with. At Premier Homecare of Indiana, we care about the health and safety of you and your loved ones. Use this checklist to assist in determining when the appropriate time may be to encourage the senior in your life to stop driving.

<b>Driving Safety Tips for Seniors*</b>	
What are the risk factors associated with aging that can affect driving abilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Decline in vision.</li> <li>✓ Hearing loss.</li> <li>✓ Limited mobility and increased reaction time.</li> <li>✓ Medications: certain medications can increase driving risks.</li> <li>✓ Drowsiness: aging can cause changes in routine sleep patterns, resulting in a tendency to doze off during the day.</li> <li>✓ Dementia or brain impairment.</li> </ul>
Are there environmental factors that can affect a senior's ability to drive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Signs and road markings may be difficult to read.</li> <li>✓ Intersections can become complex or confusing.</li> <li>✓ Drivers may be operating an older vehicle that lacks automatic safety features.</li> <li>✓ Newer vehicles with multiple displays on the dashboard may be overwhelming or puzzling.</li> </ul>
What are some warning signs of unsafe driving?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Driving excessively slow/fast.</li> <li>✓ Abrupt lane changes, braking, or acceleration.</li> <li>✓ Increase in the number of close calls, or dents/scrapes on the car or on fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs, etc.</li> <li>✓ Failure to use (or turn off) turn signals.</li> <li>✓ Drifting into other lanes.</li> <li>✓ Driving on the wrong side of the road or on</li> </ul>

<p>What are some warning signs of unsafe driving? (continued)</p>	<p>the shoulder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Trouble reading signs or directions to get somewhere.</li> <li>✓ Range-of-motion issues (i.e. looking over the shoulder, moving hands or feet, etc.).</li> <li>✓ Trouble moving the foot from the gas to the brake pedal, or confusing the two pedals.</li> <li>✓ Feeling more nervous or fearful while driving or feeling exhausted after driving.</li> <li>✓ More conflict on the road: other drivers honking; oblivious to why other drivers are honking; frustration or anger at other drivers.</li> <li>✓ Getting lost more frequently.</li> <li>✓ Difficulties paying attention to signals, road signs, pavement markings, or pedestrians.</li> <li>✓ Slow reaction to changes in the driving environment.</li> <li>✓ Increased traffic tickets or “warnings” by traffic or law enforcement officers.</li> </ul>
<p>What steps should be taken if there is concern about the safety of a senior driver?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Look for the warning signs of unsafe driving.</li> <li>✓ Watch for changes in driving habits, general behavior, and health.</li> <li>✓ Encourage a driving evaluation through the MVA/DMV, in addition to a refresher driver’s education course.</li> <li>✓ Explore ways to reduce driving and find alternate modes of transportation, such as making purchases online or arranging for someone to help run errands when needed.</li> <li>✓ Get the support of a Physician and other family members if necessary.</li> </ul>
<p>What is the appropriate way to approach and discuss this sensitive issue with your loved one?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Be understanding if resistance occurs. A car is not merely a mode of transportation, but also a symbol of independence.</li> <li>✓ Ask questions rather than make demands. (i.e. Would you consider not driving after dark?).</li> <li>✓ Talk about safety considerations for the senior driver and remind him/her that others on the road are at risk as well.</li> <li>✓ Acknowledge the lifestyle change, but discuss transportation options and alternatives.</li> <li>✓ Emphasize monetary savings of not owning/using a car.</li> <li>✓ Seek confirmation of the situation.</li> </ul>

What steps should be taken should the senior driver refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Take away the car keys.</li><li>✓ Disable the car and/or remove it from the senior driver's home.</li><li>✓ Have his/her Physician write a 'no driving' prescription and notify the MVA/DMV that this individual is no longer able to be on the road.</li></ul>
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\* The information that follows is presented for the purpose of educating the consumer on a variety of wellness and health care topics (the "Information"). Nothing contained is intended to be instructional for medical diagnosis or treatment. The Information contained is compiled from a variety of sources. The Information should not be considered complete and should not be used in place of a visit with, call to, consultation or advice from your Physician or other health care provider.

\*\* <http://www.helpguide.org/>