



# Live Healthy Georgia

## Seniors Taking Charge

### Safe Driving for Seniors

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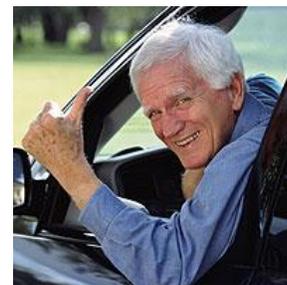
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April is **National Distracted Driver Awareness Month**. While we normally think of young drivers text-messaging their friends as a potential culprit in an accident, many older drivers are at risk of being in an accident, too. Some skills and abilities necessary to drive safely may decline as we age.

- Vision loss, especially peripheral vision, makes it difficult to see obstacles around us and judge where other vehicles are on the road.
- Hearing loss makes it difficult to notice sirens behind us, horns honking, and other vehicles being closer to us than we think.
- Loss of flexibility means that we may not be able to turn our heads all the way around to look for traffic as we change lanes. We may rely on mirrors to show us surrounding vehicles, but this leaves us open to “blind spots” where the mirror can’t reflect what’s there.
- Loss of reflexes means that we don’t react as quickly to traffic situations, such as “hitting the brakes” when the car in front of us stops suddenly.
- Concentration is important because driving is not only about controlling your own vehicle but also adapting to other drivers and obstacles.

#### How do I know if it’s safe for me to drive?

Thankfully, there is no magic formula to say that you shouldn’t drive after a particular age. In fact, about 20% of drivers in 2030 will be over age 65. We depend on our cars to get us from place to place, and older adults want to remain as active and independent as possible for as long as possible. So, it’s a good idea to check in with yourself periodically to determine if your driving skills have declined or if you need to adjust your driving habits. Think about the following questions:



- ✓ **Have I started a new medication?**
  - I should talk to my pharmacist about how it could affect my driving.
- ✓ **Am I having trouble seeing objects on the side of the road?**
  - I should have my eyes checked at least once every 6-12 months.
- ✓ **Do busy intersections make me nervous?**
  - I should observe the intersection on foot or try a different route.
- ✓ **Have family members expressed concern about my driving?**
  - I should talk to my family about their concerns and maybe have someone assess my driving.

## Safe Driving Tips for Everyone

1. ALWAYS wear your seatbelt.
2. Plan your trip ahead of time so that you know where you're going and when to leave.
3. Drive at the speed limit – driving too fast OR too slow is dangerous.
4. Keep enough distance between you and the car in front of you.
5. Use turn signals and look around your car before making a turn.
6. Look around before you take off at a green light – some cars plow through an intersection on their red light.
7. Check your blind spot before changing lanes.
8. Never eat, drink, or use a cell phone while driving. Pull over first.
9. Never drive when you're tired or angry.
10. If you don't see well at night, consider having someone else drive for you.

## Adapting Your Driving

Depending on what causes you trouble when you drive, consider making the following changes:

- ❖ Add a larger rearview mirror to increase the field of vision.
- ❖ Turn your head more frequently to compensate for decreased peripheral vision.
- ❖ Limit driving to daytime hours if it's difficult to see at night or you have a problem with glare.
- ❖ Keep your eyes on the road ahead – at least one block in the city and 30-40 seconds ahead on the highway.
- ❖ Keep more space between you and the car in front.
- ❖ Avoid left turns (make three right turns instead) if you are uncomfortable with oncoming traffic.
- ❖ Use side roads instead of busy highways if traffic makes you uncomfortable.

## When to STOP Driving

While there is no hard and fast rule for giving up your keys, here are a few signs that it may be time to let someone else drive:



- Having multiple minor accidents or near-misses within the last year.
- Having wandering thoughts or inability to concentrate while driving.
- Being unable to read ordinary road signs.
- Getting lost on familiar roads.
- Having other drivers honk at you frequently.
- Having family members talk to you about your driving.

## Resources:

- [Seniordrivers.org](http://www.seniordrivers.org) – This website provides online tools to assess your accident risk, as well as tips to improve or modify your driving habits.
- [Driving Safely](#) – This part of the Seniordrivers.org website offers a lot of health information related to driving, as well as driving tips for particular situations.
- [AAA Online Driving Course](#) - Driving courses are available locally, as well.

## References:

- AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Driver 65+ Self Rating Brochure. Available at <http://www.seniordrivers.org/driving/pdf/driver65.pdf>
- AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The Older and Wiser Driver. Available at <http://www.seniordrivers.org/pdf/olderandwiser.pdf>.
- American Medical Association. Tips for Safe Driving. Available at [http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/433/tips\\_for\\_safe\\_driv\\_in.pdf](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/433/tips_for_safe_driv_in.pdf)

## Pictures:

- <http://www.seniordrivers.org/home/>
- <http://goodtransportationinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/safe-drivers.jpg>
- <http://wadejohnston1962.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/stop.jpg>