



Aging and Transportation

As individuals age, changes in vision, physical strength and cognition can contribute to a loss of self-confidence and ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. This can lead to giving up or losing a drivers license as well as driving a vehicle.

Faced with this situation, some older adults risk personal injury rather than give up their driver's license. The problem is unsafe driving increases the risk of accidental deaths and serious injuries not only to the driver but to innocent victims such as passengers, other motorists and pedestrians.

Advanced planning to cope with age related changes can make the difference between life and death or serious injuries for the driver and others.

Aging Can Affect Transportation Independence

According to many national research efforts, senior's preferred method of transportation is driving a car. The car as a mode of transportation offers the greatest amount of independence, comfort and flexibility.



Driving a car requires excellent vision, physical and mental skills. Normal age related changes may include any combination of losses in:

- vision
- strength
- coordination
- memory
- joint range of motion
- endurance
- health

Any such change can reduce transportation independence. When age or health related changes affect safe driving, transportation alternatives have to be used for personal safety and the safety of others.

Here are some recommendations to prepare for the need to use alternative transportation options:

Recommendations

1. Plan ahead with family and friends for future transportation needs.
2. Identify transportation options in your community
 - Contact Area Agency on Aging <http://www.n4a.org/links.cfm>
 - Contact AOA's Eldercare Locator Service www.eldercare.gov
3. Get familiar and try local transportation services while health and physical skills are good.
4. Participate in your community's metropolitan planning organizations (A metropolitan planning organization (MPO) is a transportation policy-making organization made up of representatives from local government and transportation authorities.)
5. Be an advocate for senior transportation services.
6. Be prepared to modify your lifestyle when independent transportation is no longer safety possible.
7. Before giving up your license, seek the professional advice of an occupational therapist or certified driving rehabilitation specialist. Both are able to help.

How Can an Occupational Therapist (OT) help?

An OT can do the following:

- Evaluate to determine any physical, visual, or cognitive limitations that could affect ability to drive.
- Conduct an on-the-road driving test to determine how problems identified in the evaluation affect a person's ability to drive safely.
- Provide training to driver's that improve or prolong the ability to drive safely.
- Recommend assistive driving devices to make driving easier or safer.
- Provide training on how to use assistive driving devices.
- Help to identify alternate forms of transportation when driving is no longer an option.
- Consultation with friends and family about driving abilities and activities they can do to help.
- Assist the driver who is no longer able to drive to identify meaningful activities that do not require driving.

The above article was modified from the American Occupational Therapy Association's [Tips for Living: Keeping Older Drivers Safe](http://www.promoteot.org/docs/OlderDrivers.pdf).
(<http://www.promoteot.org/docs/OlderDrivers.pdf>)

To read more about older driver safety, visit <http://www1.aota.org/olderdriver/>