

Driving Skills in Older Adults

It is important for older adult drivers to be sure that they can still drive safely. Below, Dr. Raymond Carrelle Jr., a Family Physician with Community Care Physicians Latham Medical Group, answers some frequently asked questions from patients and their families regarding the ability of older adults to continue driving. Dr. Carrelle welcomes new patients to his practice at 694 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham and can be reached at 518-785-5882 to schedule an appointment.

How can I tell if I need to stop driving?

For many older adults, a time comes when they find that they can no longer drive safely. You might be worried about a health problem that affects your driving. Friends or family members might have asked if you can still drive safely. You should talk about this with your doctor. Your doctor can check your health and find out if you have the skills you need to drive safely.

Why would I need to stop driving?

If you have a health problem (such as poor sight or arthritis), it may not be safe for you to drive. This is also true if you're having trouble with memory or concentration (for example, if you often forget where you're going in the middle of a trip).

Your doctor may ask you to limit your driving in some way (for example, if you don't have good night vision, you shouldn't drive after dark). You should follow the advice of your doctor and your family. They may be worried about your safety, and they don't want you to hurt yourself or other people on the road.

What will my doctor do to help me?

If your exam reveals no health problems that would make it risky for you to drive, your doctor may still suggest you improve your driving skills. Physical or occupational therapists may be able to help you. Changes to your car such as hand controls or wide mirrors may make it easier for you to drive.

What if I don't want to stop driving?

Most older adults don't want to stop driving. They want to stay independent and have the freedom to be on their own. Giving up driving is a change in lifestyle that you may not want to face. However, remember that your safety is important to your family and to the public. If you get lost, have near-misses with other cars or have an accident, the results could be fatal. Rather than risk your life or the lives of others, you should use other kinds of transportation.

How will I get places if I can't drive?

Friends and family members will give you rides. Don't feel uncomfortable asking for rides. For example, you can choose to visit the grocery store with a friend. You can go to a social event with a relative who is planning to attend. You can also take advantage of public transportation, taxi cabs or shuttle services. Some towns and cities have special transportation services for older adults.

Giving up driving makes me feel bad.

Many people are angry when their driving is limited or when they're not allowed to drive at all. This reaction is understandable. Although you feel angry now, try to imagine how you would feel if you were injured or if you hurt someone else. For your safety and for the safety of others, follow your doctor's advice. Don't drive if you've been told it isn't safe.

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians