

Testing Driver Safety

When it comes to driving, there is no set age at which people become less safe when they're behind the wheel. Safety largely depends on the older driver's physical and mental health, which of course vary widely from person to person.

The following issues can be warning signs that suggest that you or an older adult in your care should get tested for their ability to drive safely:

- Getting lost in familiar areas
- Ignoring traffic signs and signals
- Becoming easily agitated or angered when driving
- Falling asleep or inability to concentrate when driving
- Reacting too slowly to dangerous situations
- Forgetting or ignoring driving basics – when to yield right of way, for example
- Having trouble judging distances

Several tests and reviews can help determine how safe a driver an older adult may be.

If you suspect that an older adult you care for is having difficulty driving safely, consider taking these actions:

START WITH A GOOD PHYSICAL

Have the older adult's primary care healthcare provider examine them for changes that may affect their driving, including their fitness level.

HAVE THEIR VISION CHECKED

An optometrist or an ophthalmologist can evaluate an older adult's vision for problems that may reduce their ability to drive safely.

GET A DRIVING EVALUATION

An occupational therapist (OT) trained as a driving rehabilitation specialist (DRS) can evaluate an older adult's driving to see how safe they are when driving, or if they could benefit from having their skills rehabilitated. Occupational therapists can review the older driver's general skills thoroughly, and will note areas that need improvement.

CONSIDER COGNITIVE TESTING

If you're concerned that the older adult may be having memory problems, dementia, or other problems that affect their ability to think and make decisions, talk to your primary care provider. The provider can do some simple tests to assess their mental skills and determine whether the older adult has the mental ability to drive safely.

CHECK YOUR STATE'S RULES

Many states have laws that require testing or other requirements for older drivers. Also, check the older adult's driver's license to see when it's time for renewal. Learn more about specific state requirements here:

<http://www.ghsa.org/state-laws/issues/Mature-Drivers>

KNOW WHAT MEDICATIONS THE OLDER DRIVER IS TAKING

Some medications can make people feel drowsy and less alert than usual, or can affect reaction time and other attention issues. Some prescriptions may warn against driving while taking the medication. Review the older adult's medications with their primary care provider or a pharmacist to see if their medication(s) could lead to unsafe driving.

RESOURCES

Vision testing for older adults

<http://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/good-vision-throughout-life/adult-vision-19-to-40-years-of-age/adult-vision-over-60-years-of-age?sso=y>

Eye care for older adults

<https://www.aao.org/eye-care-for-older-adults>

Safety: Older adult drivers

https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/older_adult_drivers/

Evaluations for older drivers

<http://www.aota.org/about-occupational-therapy/professionals/rdp/articles/older-drivers.aspx>

Dementia and driving care

<http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-and-driving.asp>

Self-Assessment test for older drivers

<http://seniordriving.aaa.com/evaluate-your-driving-ability/>

Organizations that provide testing and instruction for older drivers

<https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/olddrive/Driving%20Safely%20Aging%20Web/page8.html>