

February 13, 2004

Simple Secrets of Much Safer Driving

Between ages 50 and 55, most of us begin to experience the normal effects of aging when we drive. Our eyesight is weaker....our reaction time slower.

Driving ability---regardless of age---also can be hampered by such health conditions as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, Parkinson's disease and stroke---not to mention cataracts and other eye problems that cause sensitivity to glare and diminish vision.

Good news: You can accommodate these problems and still continue to drive.

Spotting Trouble

Don't wait for a tragedy to make adjustments in your driving. Signs that your driving skills are declining:

- Pleas from friends or relatives to have your eyes checked or to drive less often.
- Getting lost or making wrong turns in areas you know.
- Narrowly avoiding hitting pedestrians.
- Dents or scratches on the car that you can't explain.
- Being honked at more often.
- One serious accident or two minor crashes within the last year, even if you weren't fault. Collisions often are the result of the reduced ability to drive defensively when other motorists are in the wrong.

If you spot any of these signs, ask your doctor and/or ophthalmologist to help find the cause. It might be easily treated.

Ask your doctor if any medications might be impairing your driving ability. Perhaps you should take it at different times of the day or switch medications.

Smart Moves

Anyone can improve his/her driving ability by taking some relatively simple steps:

- **Drive at off-peak hours.** Also use less traveled routes. If there isn't a convenient alternate route, look for roads where regular traffic lights keep traffic moving at an easy even pace.
- **Drive a car with power steering and antilock brakes.** If your vehicle doesn't have these features, consider upgrading when you buy your next vehicle.

Caution: If you have never used antilock brakes make sure that you know how to use them properly. Ask your car dealer or consult the service manual.

- **Drive a light-colored car.** It is more easily seen and therefore less likely to be hit. Any light color will do.
- **Drive with headlights on.** Use them even during the day to make the car more visible. Many new cars now have automatic daytime running lights for safety.
- **Don't drive until your windshields are completely clear.** If your defroster doesn't clear them quickly, have it checked. Turning the air conditioner to the warmest setting also may help clear the windshield.
- **Turn on the windshield wipers,** and squirt the windshield with wiper fluid when you encounter sloppy conditions. If you wait, slush is likely to freeze on the cold windshield and quickly reduce visibility.
- **Rethink night driving.** Don't wear tinted glasses---they limit night vision. Turn your gaze away from oncoming car lights, and focus on the right side of the road. Stop driving as soon as you feel unsure of yourself.
- **Leave extra distance** between your car and the car ahead of yours. Increase the interval between when the car in front passes a fixed point and when your car does. Instead of two seconds, make it three or four. You'll have more time to react.
- **Don't make a left turn** at an intersection that doesn't have a left turn lane. Make three right-hand turns instead.
- **Limber up before you drive.** Exercises such as neck and trunk rotation can decrease time needed for braking, steering and other maneuvers.
- **Install a wide-angle rearview mirror** if you have difficulty turning your head to see traffic around you.
- **Eliminate distractions in the car.** Keep the radio volume down. Pull over to the side of the road to read a map or use a cell phone, even if you have a headset. Don't overload your car with distracting electronic devices. If you are navigating unfamiliar roads, write directions in large clear print on a pad.

Improve your driving skills

Take a defensive driving course. The vast majority of participants experience an improvement in skill whether or not they had driving problems. These courses are so effective that insurers discount liability and collision rates by up to 10% for drivers who complete them.

Safety Tip: Since at least 50,000 people are killed on the highways annually in motor vehicle accidents, safe driving is a skill that you must practice all the time. It could mean the difference between life and death.



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