

DRIVING

Driving a car gives people the opportunity to enjoy an independent living lifestyle with a great amount of freedom and mobility. However, driving can be a very complex activity and much can go wrong.

Whilst injuries and fatalities as a result of driving can affect anyone at any age, older drivers are involved in more road accidents than people of most other ages. Even though older drivers have the benefit of experience on their side, this cannot always compensate for normal age related changes in vision, movement and information processing - all of which can affect the ability to drive safely. Older people are also more likely to be taking medications as a result of age related health problems or medical conditions, many of which can affect driving ability.

For responsible citizens, this means acknowledging age related limitations and taking appropriate measures to ensure both your individual safety and that of all other road users. As RACQ traffic and safety manager John Wikman points out:

“with good health, the right attitude to the driving task, and some adjustments where necessary, there are few reasons why older drivers cannot retain their on-road mobility.”

In recognition of the needs of older drivers the RACQ has developed a comprehensive awareness program for Queensland’s older drivers incorporating a special handbook, informative seminars, and the option of participating in on-road refresher courses. The aim of the program being to help older drivers (60 plus) keep up to date with road rules and driving techniques.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Queensland Transport Road Safety
Tel: 4121 8322

OR

Drop into your local Queensland Transport Customer Service Centre

The Older Driver

Age and ill health may restrain some aspects of your lifestyle, however careful management and common sense can allow you the mobility that comes with holding a driver's licence. Driving safely in your later years is simply a matter of knowing your limits. As we get older, normal bodily changes coupled with health problems and associated medications can affect how safely we drive. Although older drivers often have years of driving experience, this is not enough to compensate for age related changes to vision, movement and information processing.

Vision

Vision is one of the most important senses for driving. Some of the ways it can be affected by age are:

- 👁️ **Clarity of Vision:** It is often harder to see detail, such as traffic signs, and may be difficult to change focus.
- 👁️ **Ability to see Fainter Objects:** It is harder to see objects and obstacles, such as pedestrians or people on bicycles.
- 👁️ **Ability to Handle and Recover from Glare:** It can be more difficult to deal with situations such as oncoming headlights or afternoon sun.
- 👁️ **Range or Field of Vision:** It is more difficult to see things in your side vision (side vision is what people see out of the corner of their eyes when looking ahead).
- 👁️ **Adjusting to Changes in Light:** It takes longer for eyesight to adjust when going from light to dark or vice versa.

Looking After Your Vision

- 👁️ Have regular check-ups at the optometrist or ophthalmologist at least every two years to make sure that your vision is as good as possible.
- 👁️ Keep the prescription for your glasses up to date and make sure your glasses are suitable for driving.
- 👁️ Be aware of how your vision will change and how it can affect your driving. Modify your driving patterns to allow for some of these changes, for example, think about limiting or avoiding driving at night time or twilight.
- 👁️ Modify your car to help compensate for age-related changes in vision. For example, the reduction of side vision with age can be partly overcome by installing special mirrors and making sure that there are properly adjusted wing mirrors on both sides of the car.
- 👁️ Keep your windscreen clean to reduce glare.
- 👁️ Medical conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and diabetes can also impair your vision. Even though eye diseases can affect drivers of any age, they are more common in older people

Vision Checklist

Tick the box that corresponds to your answer.

	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Never
Do you have any problems reading road signs or the numbers on buses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you are driving, does the glare from headlights or the sun bother you more than it used to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you are driving, do cars and objects seem to appear unexpectedly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does driving at twilight or night bother you more than it used to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it harder to adjust to changes in light? (for example, going from the dark cinema to outside.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to recognise a familiar face from across the street?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Did You Score?

If you mostly answered “Frequently” or “Often” to any of these questions, you should consult an optometrist or ophthalmologist to check on your vision. If you mostly answered “Sometimes” or “Never” it is still worthwhile considering regular eyesight check-ups.

REMEMBER...Driving Safely Is A Matter Of Being At Your Best

For The Older Driver.....Vision is generally not as good at twilight or night time.

Movement

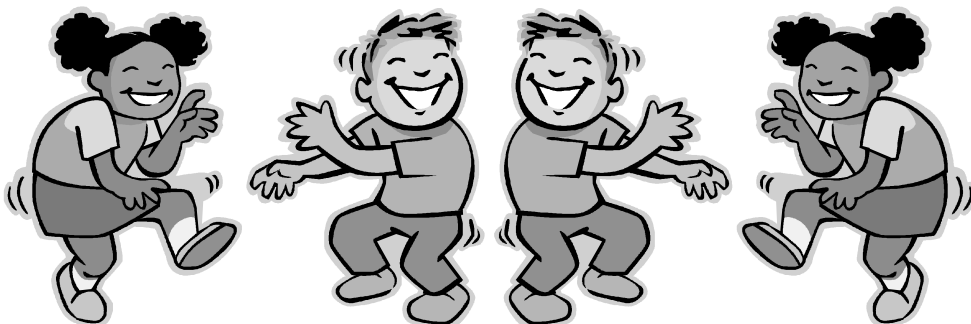
Changes to the body as a result of ageing can make movement slower and more difficult. Some of the changes you might notice as you get older are:

- ‡ Decreased muscle strength.
- ‡ Decreased speed of reflexes and movement.
 - ‡ Decreased flexibility and mobility.
 - ‡ More limited range of movement.
 - ‡ Poorer co-ordination and dexterity.

All these changes, plus common health problems (especially painful conditions such as arthritis), can affect the way people drive, for example, you may find it harder to operate car controls such as the gears and clutch. These changes also contribute to slower reaction times in older drivers.

Maintaining Your Mobility

- ‡ Stay as fit and active as possible. Research suggests that when you are fit and healthy, you have fewer movement problems and can react promptly.
- ‡ Take up exercise that helps flexibility, strength, and fitness, such as yoga, tai-chi or hydrotherapy.
- ‡ If you are buying another car, buy one with features such as power steering, automatic transmission and power brakes, and consider buying as small a car as practical. Make sure the seat height is adjusted appropriately for you.
- ‡ If turning your head is a problem, install special mirrors to extend your view.



Movement Checklist

Tick the box that corresponds to your answer:

	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Never
Are you finding it more difficult to turn your head to check blind spots while you drive, or to look over your shoulder while you park?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you having more difficulty turning the wheel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you finding it harder to operate the controls of the car (e.g. gears, clutch, brake, accelerator, indicators)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you having more difficulty getting in and out of the car?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you having more trouble stepping on the brake pedal in time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Did You Score?

If you mostly answered “Frequently” or “Often” to these questions, you should consult your doctor to see if you have any particular health problems which may need attention. Additionally, you may like to think about altering your car or driving patterns. If you “Sometimes” encounter these problems, it is worthwhile monitoring any changes.

Information Processing

As we get older, our ability to process information and react to it tends to slow down. Although much of this process seems automatic, in reality our mind and body are working very hard to process all the information and plan a reaction. In situations where you have to drive under pressure and have less time to react, these types of changes become more of a problem. Consider the demands of:

- ☀ Driving at peak hour.
- ☀ Merging onto a busy freeway.
- ☀ Changing lanes in traffic.
- ☀ Travelling an unfamiliar route.
- ☀ Avoiding an accident.
- ☀ Dealing with a busy intersection or roundabout.

Understanding the stress some driving situations may cause can help you plan to accommodate necessary changes.

Remember:-

- ☀ Avoid complex and unpredictable situations such as busy intersections and rush hour traffic. If possible, plan an alternative route and travel at a less busy time.
- ☀ Try to avoid busy intersections where you have to make a right-hand turn across the traffic (unless there is a light with a right turn arrow).
- ☀ Be aware that you may take longer to respond quickly in demanding situations when driving, and allow for this where possible.
- ☀ Make sure that you are up to date on the road rules and road signs – especially the rules for situations like major intersections and multi-lane roundabouts.
- ☀ Plan out routes before travelling, and stick to familiar routes where possible.
- ☀ Use other forms of transport for more unfamiliar or difficult trips.
- ☀ Keep your concentration and attention while driving by avoiding too many distractions in the car (e.g. music, grandchildren and pets).
- ☀ Avoid driving in difficult and demanding weather conditions.
- ☀ Brush up on your driving skills by attending a course or having an expert check your driving. This isn't a test – just some help to let you know how to be at your best.

Information Processing Checklist

Tick the box that corresponds to your answer:

	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Never
Do you find it harder to deal with rush hour or busy intersections?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you more cautious while driving?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you finding driving more tiring or stressful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you get lost more often while driving?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you finding it harder merging into traffic or changing lanes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you less confident driving to new or different places?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you finding it harder to regularly monitor your car instruments (e.g. speedometer) while maintaining your position on the road?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Did You Score?

If you mostly answered “Frequently” or “Often” to any of these questions, you may like to brush up on your driving skills or consider altering your current driving patterns. If you “Sometimes” encounter these problems, you may need to think about making some gradual changes to your driving behaviour.

Driving and Medications

Age is not the only thing that affects our ability to process information and react quickly and appropriately. Certain medications, both prescription and over the counter, can significantly affect judgement and movement. Alcohol, **no matter what your age**, will always affect your reflexes and judgement, especially in combination with medication.

Some of the following medications can interfere with your ability to drive safely:-

- ☞ Sleeping Pills and medications to help with anxiety.
- ☞ Pain Killers.
- ☞ Allergy medicines and cough/cold preparations.
- ☞ Antidepressants.
- ☞ Medications for Diabetes.
- ☞ Blood Pressure medications.

If you take any of these medications, double check that it is OK to drive. Always double check medication labels. Medications that can affect driving should have a warning label. If you are taking more than one medication at a time, be aware that they can interact with one another and affect your driving. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist about the effects of any of your medications and how they may affect each other, and whether this will interfere with your driving.

Other Health Problems

Many health problems or medical conditions can affect the older driver. The conditions listed below are all generally considered to impair driving because they can affect your ability to control the vehicle.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| ☞ Diabetes (early and late onset). | ☞ Eye Problems. |
| ☞ Arthritis and other joint problems. | ☞ Heart Disease. |
| ☞ Sleep Disorders. | ☞ Injuries and disabilities. |
| ☞ Depression and mental health problems. | ☞ Epilepsy. |
| ☞ Strokes. | ☞ Hearing Disorders. |
| ☞ Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. | ☞ Lung Disease |



Plan For The Future

Having a medical condition does **not** necessarily mean that you need to give up driving. But you may need to modify your driving or seek professional advice on how to change your driving patterns. If you have any health problems, it is important that you discuss the effects they may have on your driving with your doctor. You may need a medical certificate stating that you are medically fit to drive. This may include certain conditions which place limitations on your driving. For example, daylight driving only.

Drivers with an amended license due to a medical condition, and all drivers aged 75 and over, are required to carry their medical certificate whilst driving. While these drivers can obtain a license for up to five years, doctors may issue a medical certificate that is for less than the maximum renewal period. This allows the monitoring of medical conditions without the inconvenience of frequent license renewals. Where a medical certificate is issued for less than five years, the license will display an “M”, and the driver is required to show a current medical certificate if requested to do so by Police.

At some stage you may have to stop driving altogether. If you are moving house, try to make sure you move close to public transport and services such as shops and recreation facilities.

Insurance companies have different policies for older drivers and those with medical conditions. Check to make sure your cover is not affected.

REMEMBER!

If the time has come, due to your age or medical condition, to surrender your driver’s licence, see it as a “wise” move for the safety of yourself, your passengers and others. Learn to sit back and become a more relaxed passenger while someone else does the driving for you.



Protecting Your Car Against Theft

The following guidelines are designed to reduce the opportunity for crime and decrease the chances of your car being a target. To let a prospective thief know you are security smart, you can take the following actions.

- 🔒 Make your car difficult to steal or break into.
- 🔒 Always lock car doors and wind up windows.
- 🔒 Avoid leaving spare keys in, on or under the car. Separate car and house keys and leave spares with trusted friends or neighbours.
- 🔒 Avoid placing your name, address or car registration number on keys.
- 🔒 Park your car in a garage where possible. Lock both the car and the garage.
- 🔒 Always remove your ignition keys.
- 🔒 Park in the driveway rather than on the street if practicable.
- 🔒 If you do park in the street, use an area which is well lit at night.
- 🔒 Take bags or valuables with you or lock them in the boot out of sight.
- 🔒 Record your vehicle chassis number (VIN), engine numbers and the serial numbers of keys and accessories (e.g. air conditioning condenser and sound system).
- 🔒 Identification marking of vehicle and parts (including windows) may act as a deterrent factor and can be used for identification should your car be stolen.

Anti – Theft Devices

Consider installing an anti-theft device to your car. Carefully choose a device that is appropriate for your needs. Anti theft devices include:

- 🔒 Ignition or Fuel cut–out switch.
- 🔒 Ignition shield.
- 🔒 Steering wheel or Transmission lock.
- 🔒 Battery isolator.
- 🔒 Glass break detector.
- 🔒 Transmission lock.
- 🔒 Handbrake or Wheel lock.
- 🔒 Ultrasonic motion sensor that detects movement inside the car.
- 🔒 High powered electronic noise-maker and standby power unit.

Installing an Electronic Anti-Theft System

An alarm system should be insurance approved and operate instantaneously on all doors, the bonnet, boot and car interior. Always make sure you attach warning stickers to your car indicating the presence of an anti-theft device. Do not identify the type of device. Remember any alarm / device can only be effective if you activate it when you leave your car, whether it be for 2 minutes or 2 hours. Maintain the alarm in good repair.

If your vehicle is stolen report it to police immediately, giving the registration number, make, model, colour, and the time and place of the offence.