

To Drive or Not to Drive?

The question that we should all be asking.



Driver safety

is everybody's concern. On a per-person basis, mature drivers have less than the average number of collisions, but on a per-kilometre basis, the over-70 age group is involved in a disproportionately high number of collisions.



Profile of older drivers

Most drivers over the age of 65 drive only a few times a week (shopping, personal, medical and social appointments). Their trips are relatively short averaging from 11 to 17 km per day, driving less at night and typically at non-rush hour times.

The predominant type of accidents involving older drivers (Canadian Safety Council, DriveAble Dr. C. Chung):

- occur at intersections and involve: Right of way, Left turns, Traffic sign violations
- are less likely to involve speed
- are more likely to involve more than one vehicle
- are 3 times more likely to result in death (the second highest cause of accidental mortality in seniors next to falls).



Common issues that affect older individuals:

Driving a motor vehicle is a complex activity that requires important cognitive skills such as memory, judgement, and attention. Medical

conditions can reduce these abilities and make even the most experienced drivers unsafe. Increased risk is not due to age in itself, but to the increasing number of health conditions that can affect driving ability, including: visual impairment/changes, seizures, fainting spells, diabetes, arthritis, sleep apnea, heart conditions, stroke or brain injury, cognitive difficulties (dementia), psychiatric conditions, Parkinson's and similar conditions, and/or fatigue.

The effects of different medical conditions on driving ability are many and varied. Medications can make a driver more susceptible to risk - and Canadians over age 65 take an average of nine medications daily, including prescription, over-the-counter and herbal. (Report of the Pharmaceutical Inquiry of Ontario, The Lowy Commission Report, Toronto, 1990)

Progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or dementia, often have the most profound effect on driving skills, reducing the cognitive abilities, resulting in an increased crash risk. In fact, drivers with cognitive deficits are 7.6 times more likely to be in an at-fault crash. To put this in context, drivers with a blood alcohol level of .08 have a 5.0 fold increase in the risk of a crash.

A study in the July 2004 Canadian Journal of Psychiatry (Driving and Dementia in Ontario: A Quantitative Assessment of the Problem), led by Dr. Robert Hopkins,

estimates there are 34,000 Ontario drivers who have dementia. With an aging driver population, it projects that number will rise to nearly 100,000 by 2028.



Things you can do:

Vision, Hearing and Medication

- Have regular vision and hearing examinations.
- When traveling, always wear your eyeglasses or hearing aid.
- Give yourself time to adjust to new eyeglasses and have your glasses checked periodically.
- Use medication correctly, know how it could affect your driving and ensure you are free from harmful effects before driving. With some medicines, you may not be able to drive at all.

With respect to the development of cognitive issues and the ability to drive, CanDRIVE (The Canadian Driving Research Initiative for Vehicular Safety in the Elderly -Transport Canada) offers some questions that could be asked:

- Do you feel uncomfortable driving with the older driver?
- Have you noticed any abnormal or unsafe driving behaviour?
- Has the older driver had any recent crashes?
- Has the older driver had any near-misses that can be attributed to mental or physical decline?
- Has the driver received any recent traffic tickets?
- Are other drivers forced to drive defensively to accommodate the older driver's errors in judgment?
- Have there been times when the

older driver has become lost or experienced navigational confusion?

- Does the driver require many cues or directions from passengers?
- Does the driver need a co-pilot to alert them of potentially dangerous situations?
- Have others commented on the person's unsafe driving?

If you have any concerns about someone's driving ability, speak to them, speak to their doctor, or speak to a specialist about a driving assessment programs and refresher courses in your community, or suggest they consider taking a taxi. ▫

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Statistics (Canadian Safety Council)

- Almost 30% of Canada's population was over 50 in 2002.
- Drivers over 80 are the fastest-growing segment of the driving population.
- Between 1988 and 1998, fatal crashes involving drivers aged 65+ increased by 6.3%, while injury crashes increased by 10.7%. (Transport Canada Fact Sheet)
- Half of Canadians over 65 living in a private household drive a motor vehicle.
- Senior men are far more likely to drive than senior women - 55% of households where the man held a valid licence, he was the exclusive driver. (1996 National Private Vehicle Use Survey)