

Help senior drivers maintain their independence

As men and women age, various factors may affect their ability to drive. In addition to issues with memory, seniors may have failing eyesight and physical limitations, and their reaction time may slow down. In such instances, seniors' ability to safely operate a motor vehicle may be questioned.

Age alone is not a reliable measure of driving ability, but many of the issues that affect one's ability to safely drive a vehicle tend to appear as men and women near their golden years.

Losing the ability to safely operate an automobile can greatly reduce a person's independence. That is why periodic driver evaluations may be met with some reluctance. Aging men and women who don't want to avoid potential conflicts with concerned family members can take their own steps to ensure they maintain their ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.

Schedule a driving safety evaluation

When drivers' abilities to operate a motor vehicle become suspect, a thorough evaluation should be scheduled. The evaluation should not be handled by a family physician or family member, but by an unbiased third party like a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist. This is a therapist who has special certification to assist people with disabilities, including older adults, with driving. They can help individuals with adaptive equipment or techniques if driving issues stem from something that can be addressed.

Figure out if the car "fits" the individual

A program called CarFit can help drivers assess if their car is suited to their abilities. A team of trained technicians and/or health professionals work with participants to en-



sure their vehicles are equipped for maximum safety and comfort. A properly adjusted vehicle is as important as one's cognitive and physical abilities. Adjustments can include mirror placement, good foot positioning and sitting at the proper distance from the steering wheel. People can learn about an upcoming event at www.car-fit.org.

Take a driver improvement course

Driver improvement courses are provided by various organizations, including some insurance companies. AARP also has a Driver Safety Course to lower the risk of traffic violations, collisions and injuries. Completion of these courses can help drivers enhance their abilities behind the wheel and may result in lower premiums for mature drivers.

Keep the mind and body fit

Regular exercise and a healthy diet can be assets for mature drivers. Mental fitness techniques and brain exercises can improve reaction time, while aerobic and strength-training workouts can keep the body in shape.

Driving is one of the key avenues to personal independence. Strengthening seniors' driving abilities is a goal of many organizations.

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