

DRIVERS 55 PLUS:



Check Your Own Performance



*A Self-Rating Form of
Questions, Facts and
Suggestions for Safe Driving*

Test Your Own Performance

By the year 2000, one of every three drivers in America will be over 55 years of age. Freedom to travel by automobile will continue to be an important factor to maintain personal independence and mental health.

Almost everyone concerned with traffic safety wants to keep older drivers on the highways as long as they can drive safely. Age should never be mistaken as the sole indicator of driving ability. In fact, drivers over 55 represent a wide range of abilities, and no individual should have his or her license jeopardized solely because of age.

However, skills necessary for safe driving – vision, reflexes, flexibility, hearing – begin to deteriorate around age 55 with an even greater loss after 75. Aging drivers can adjust their driving habits to cope safely with this decline, but to do this they must recognize their limitations and unsafe practices and be aware of remedial actions. Creating this awareness is the purpose of this older driver self-rating booklet.

The rating form on the next page is for your use alone. Answer the 15 questions as honestly as possible. Use the rating guide to compute your score and learn where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Then, read the Suggestions for Improvement section that corresponds to each question to see how you can improve your driving. If your answers reveal serious problems, you will be helped to understand when remedial measures may no longer be possible.

The central idea is to help you drive as long as possible with safety to yourself and others.

Now, please follow the instructions on the next page.

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Drivers 55 Plus: Self-Rating Form

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following 15 questions, check the symbol (✓) of the one answer that most applies to you.

| | Always or Almost Always | Some- times | Never or Almost Never |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. I signal and check to the rear when I change lanes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I wear a seat belt | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I try to stay informed on changes in driving and highway regulations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Intersections bother me because there is so much to watch from all directions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I find it difficult to decide when to join traffic on a busy interstate highway | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. When I am really upset, I show it in my driving | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. My thoughts wander when I am driving | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Traffic situations make me angry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. I get regular eye checks to keep my vision at its sharpest | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I check with my doctor or pharmacist about the effects of my medications on driving ability. <i>(If you do not take any medication, skip this question.)</i> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I try to stay abreast of current information on health practices and habits | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. My children, other family members or friends are concerned about my driving ability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| | Note new headings → | None | One or Two |
| 14. How many traffic tickets, warnings, or "discussions" with officers have you had in the past two years? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. How many accidents have you had during the past two years? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Self Scoring: Count the number of checkmarks in the squares and record the total in the square below. Follow the same procedure for the triangles and circles.



These are your Check Mark Totals.
For score and interpretation, see next page. →

Scoring: There are 5 steps.

Step 1: Write the Check Mark Total recorded in the square on the previous page in the square to the right.



X 5 = _____

Step 2: Write the Check Mark Total recorded in the triangle on the previous page in the triangle to the right.



X 3 = _____

Step 3: Multiply the number in the square by 5.

Step 4: Multiply the number in the triangle by 3.

Step 5: Add the results of Steps 3 and 4.

YOUR SCORE IS _____

Interpretation of Score: The **lower** the score, the safer driver you are.

The **higher** the score, the more danger you are to yourself and others.

No matter what your score, look at the Suggestions for Improvement section for each area in which you checked a square or triangle. These are the areas in which you can improve the most.

SCORE

MEANING

0 to 15

GO! You are aware of what is important to safe driving and are practicing what you know. See the Suggestions for Improvement in the following section of this booklet, to learn how to become an even safer driver.

16 to 34

CAUTION! You are engaging in some practices that need improvement to ensure safety. Look to the Suggestions for Improvement section to see how you might improve driving.

35 and over

STOP! You are engaging in too many unsafe driving practices. You are a potential or actual hazard to yourself and others. Examine the areas where you checked squares or triangles. Read the Suggestions for Improvement section for ways to correct these problem areas.

These scores are based on what you and other drivers 55 and over have told us about driving practices and habits. Your score is based on your answers to a limited number of important questions. For a complete evaluation of your driving ability, many more questions would be required, along with medical, physical, and licensing examinations. Nevertheless, your answers and score give some indication of how well you are doing and how you can become a safer driver.

In general, a checked square for an item reflects an unsafe practice or situation that should be changed immediately. A checked triangle means a practice or situation that is unsafe, or on its way to becoming unsafe, if nothing is done to improve it. Checking circles is a sign that you are doing what you should to be (and remain) a safe driver.

Most of the square and triangle answers represent practices or situations that can be improved by most drivers. The following pages contain Suggestions for Improvement, divided into each of the 15 areas. You will want to focus on those for which you check squares or triangles.

Drivers 55 Plus: Suggestions for Improvement

Introduction

Think about what tasks you do every time you get behind the wheel of a car. You must coordinate the actions of your hands, feet, eyes, ears, and body movements. At the same time, you must decide how to react to what you see, hear, and feel in relation to other cars and drivers, traffic signs and signals, conditions of the highway, and the performance of your car.

These decisions are usually made close to other vehicles and must be converted quickly into action — brake, steer, accelerate, or a combination of all — to maintain or adjust your position in traffic. And these decisions must be made frequently. About 20 major decisions are needed for each mile driven; drivers frequently have less than one-half second to act to avoid a collision.

The record of older drivers is good, when you consider the number of collisions per driver, but when you consider the number of collisions per miles driven, this record is surprisingly bad. Older drivers have fewer collisions, because they drive less and at less dangerous times. But when they are in a crash, it can be very serious. In a two-car fatal collision, where one driver is 65 or older, the older driver is 3.5 times more likely to be killed. Injuries that are seen as moderate to severe for most people are fatal to people aged 55 and older.

Purpose of this Booklet. One of the purposes of this self-rating form is to help you become, if you are not already, an “activated driver.” An activated driver is someone who assumes responsibility for his or her own driving skills and who self-examines and compares his or her ability with the requirements for safe driving. The premise of this booklet is that through knowledge and self-awareness, you will understand what a safe driver is and will assume the responsibility to be a safe driver or to decide to give up the driver’s license and seek other forms of transportation.

The questionnaire you have just completed has helped you to locate those areas where your physical and mental abilities call for a change in your driving habits and skills. This section of the booklet offers suggestions to improve each driving skill highlighted in the questionnaire. Be sure to focus on those sections that correspond to the problem areas identified by the questionnaire.

About 20 major decisions are needed for each mile driven; drivers frequently have less than one-half second to act to avoid a collision.

This section of the booklet offers suggestions to improve each driving skill highlighted in the questionnaire.

1

I signal and check to the rear when I change lanes.

Even if you checked “Never,” you probably know that “Always” is the only acceptable answer. Checking rearview and side mirrors, looking to the rear to cover the blind spots, and signaling well before your maneuver are the only ways to avoid hitting a car when changing lanes.

But why don't you do these things all the time? In some cases, you might simply forget. In observational studies, older drivers report being unaware of having failed to look to the rear before changing lanes or backing up. Many of our driving habits are exactly that – habits. And we stop being aware of our actions, especially if we've driven accident-free for a long time.

Many older drivers stop looking over their shoulders because they've lost flexibility. If you have arthritis, then you know how painful a quick look over the shoulder can be.

If looking over your shoulder to check for traffic is difficult for you, you'll want to:

Safety Tips:

- Drive with a partner to act as a co-pilot whenever possible.
- Install extra-wide rearview mirrors and side mirrors to decrease your blind spots. You'll need to learn how to use the side mirrors correctly, because those of convex lens design can make objects appear smaller and farther away than they actually are.
- Ask your physician about medications and exercises that might improve your flexibility; the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has a brochure called “A Flexibility Fitness Training Package for Improving Older Driver Performance” to help you improve your flexibility.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the limitations due to aging. (Call your local AAA club about courses. See the back of this booklet for other organizations that offer driving programs.)
- Make a concerted effort to be aware of your driving habits and decide to always look before changing lanes.

Of all traffic fatalities, one-half could have been injuries instead of deaths if the people had been wearing seat belts.

People over 65 are more likely than younger persons to be injured or killed, when involved in an accident.

2

I wear a seat belt.

The only acceptable answer is “Always.” In nearly every state, wearing seat belts is now the law. For people over 55, there is an added incentive for wearing seat belts: One-half of all traffic fatalities could have been lessened to injuries if the people had been wearing seat belts, and people over 65 are more likely than younger persons to be injured or killed, when involved in an accident.

Even if you are going to drive only a short distance under ideal conditions, it makes sense to wear your seat belt. Typical collisions involving older drivers occur on clear days, on straight, dry pavement, and at intersections within 15

Wear your seat belt correctly... across your shoulder and chest – NOT under an arm, across your hip bones – NOT your stomach. It's comfortable... it's easy.



*New York Coalition for Safety Belt Use
Medical Society, State of New York

miles of the driver's home. To be effective seat belts should be properly worn (see diagram).

The negative tales you may have heard about seat belts, such as being trapped in a car that catches fire, are either myths or extraordinarily rare events. Properly fastened seat belts are unquestionably the best way to reduce injuries and fatalities following a crash.

You can increase your chances of surviving a collision or reducing injury by taking the following steps:

Safety Tips:

- Accept the clearly demonstrated value of seat belts in saving lives and reducing injuries. Convince those who travel with you of this value. Then make sure that you and all who ride in your car wear them.
- Wear your seat belt properly at all times, even if your car is equipped with air bags. Shoulder belts should fit across your shoulder and upper thigh bones. Serious injury can occur if improperly worn.
- If your seat belt is extremely uncomfortable or cannot be properly fastened, take it to a competent mechanic for alterations. Many cars have adjustable shoulder belt mounts or you can buy devices that improve the fit.
- If your car does not have an automatic reminder to fasten seat belts, leave yourself a note on the dashboard or sun visor. Remind your passengers to buckle up. Show them how the belts work.

3 I try to stay informed of changes in driving and highway regulations.

The best answer is "Always," but "Sometimes" is certainly better than "Never."

Drivers of any age can be a menace if they do not know and follow "the rules of the road," no matter how good a driver they have been in the past. New traffic laws and devices include right-turn-on-red laws, directional signals regulating lane use, and shared left-turn lane markings.

Knowledge of signs and symbols can help you, especially if your ability to see these devices is diminishing. Sometimes, just knowing what the shapes of signs mean can help you anticipate their message. Familiarity and knowing what to do eliminates hesitation and uncertainty when you need to make a decision fast.

Because we all want to share the road safely, we need to understand traffic laws, devices, signs, and symbols. Here's how you can learn more about them:

Safety Tips:

- Call or visit your state's motor vehicle administration to obtain the current drivers licensing manual for your state. Study the manual as though you were taking the test. Ask if they have other ways for you to stay current.

- Take a re-training or refresher course.
- Check with your local AAA club or library to see if they have very recent copies of driver education textbooks or of the AAA brochure, "Road Signs, Signals, and Markings."
- Make a point of reading articles in your local newspapers for changes in traffic patterns and special intersections or signage, so you feel prepared and confident. Some magazines publish driving tips that can help you stay current.

4

Intersections bother me: There is too much to watch for from all directions.

Ideally, you might like to answer "Never," but if you checked "Sometimes" or "Always," you are not alone. Everyone has problems with intersections. You must interact with other drivers and pedestrians whose movements and decisions are difficult to anticipate.

Intersections are one of the more common sites of collisions involving older drivers, especially left-turning situations.

How comfortable you feel around intersections can be an early warning sign that you need a refresher course or other assistance. Listen to your instincts and take a good look at your driving skills. What bothers you most about intersections? Is it an inability to handle all the information quickly enough? Are you unsure about how to position the car for a left or right turn? Do you find it difficult to turn the steering wheel because of arthritis or some other physical problem? Sometimes, this sort of analysis can lead you to solutions.

If you find intersections difficult, see the following steps for improvement:

- If one or two intersections on your regular routes give you particular trouble, study them while on foot. Watch the problems other drivers have to handle. Notice how the signals assist drivers and pedestrians. This way you know in advance what the common problems are and how to handle them when they occur. This kind of analysis can help you handle other intersections as well.
- Plan your trips to avoid busy intersections or use them at less congested times. Plan an alternate route to avoid left turns from busy intersections.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the limitations of age. What you learn may give you the confidence to recognize that you can handle intersections correctly.
- Call your AAA club for the AAA brochure, "One Good Turn Deserves Another."

Intersections are one of the more common sites of collisions involving older drivers, especially left-turning situations.

Safety Tips:

5 I find it difficult to decide when to join traffic on a busy interstate highway.

Most of us would like to answer “Never,” but if you checked “Sometimes” or “Always,” you are not alone.

Almost all drivers have some feelings of insecurity and nervousness about entering a busy interstate highway or any high-speed road. If you dislike the speed of traffic and the number of cars on interstates or have stopped using them entirely, then you will probably want to improve your skills so you can use them more confidently.

If you live where interstates are convenient and you travel them often, you probably have gained experience and feel confident about driving on them. However, if you drive them infrequently or not at all, you are probably fearful of what you “don’t know” about them. Even if you have experience, there are more cars, faster traffic, and more congestion than ever before. Unless you have stayed informed of these changes and have made them part of your everyday driving experience, interstates can be intimidating.

Here are some suggestions for improving your skills on interstate highways:

Safety Tips:

- If you decide that you do not know enough about interstates to drive on them safely and that reluctance to enter them may in part be a fear of the unknown, take a refresher course to learn how to use interstates properly.
- If you feel you have the ability to drive on interstates, but want to improve your skills, ask another experienced driver whose opinion you trust to ride with you and suggest what you should and should not do. Then, practice when traffic is less congested.
- If you feel so uncomfortable on interstates that you feel you may be in danger, try to avoid them. There is always another, parallel route. You are your own best judge of whether they are safe for you, regardless of how safe they may be for others.
- Call your AAA club for the AAA brochure, “Freeway Driving Demands Special Skills.”

6 I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations.

“Never” is the only fully satisfactory answer here, although you may have answered “Sometimes” and still be considered a careful driver. Emergencies and dangerous situations may be relatively uncommon, but fast and safe reaction to them is essential. Most older drivers tend to have excellent judgment when driving. It is in reacting to emergencies that some older drivers most markedly demonstrate a slowing down.

Older drivers have trouble integrating information from several sources at once, and therefore respond more slowly to dangerous situations.

We begin to feel the physical and psychological changes of aging in middle age, and some of these changes can increase driving risk. The increased collision rate per mile of travel that begins between ages 55 and 65 parallels certain age-related declines in driving skills.

To respond quickly to a traffic situation requires that several skills be sharp: First, you must see or hear the danger. Second, you have to recognize that the situation is dangerous and requires action. Third, you must decide how to act. And fourth, you must act appropriately. A slight slowing down in each of these skills can result in a much slower overall response time to traffic emergencies.

What can you do to improve your “emergency” skills?

Safety Tips:

- See an occupational therapist and have your physical and mental driving skills evaluated. In many cases, practice exercises can improve your skills. Many hospitals offer out-patient counseling.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the limitations of age. There, you can learn and practice ways to improve your ability to more rapidly anticipate and avoid dangerous situations.
- Avoid driving in congested, fast-moving traffic, whenever possible.
- Keep yourself physically fit and mentally stimulated. Avoid driving if you have been drinking, are tired, ill, or have taken any drug that slows your mental or physical responses.
- Under supervision, exercise to maintain or increase the flexibility of your joints and your muscular strength.
- If your joint and muscle impairments are serious, ask your doctor about medical, physical, and surgical therapies. Anti-inflammatory drugs and various surgical procedures can lessen impairment sufficiently to permit safe driving.
- Equip your car with devices that compensate for losses of flexibility and strength and learn how to use them. Make sure your next car has power steering, power brakes, automatic seat adjustment, and other features to help you control your car better.

7

When I am really upset, I show it in my driving.

The only acceptable answer is “Never.” It takes only a brief acting out of emotions or a moment of inattention to produce a collision. Anger is an emotion to keep out of the car when you are in it with the motor running.

As you age, experience and good judgment make you a better driver. However, if you were aggressive and hostile on the road when young, you are likely to be much the same today. The difference is that now, because of decreased driving skills, you may not have the ability to recover from those dangerous highway situations that arise out of aggression and hostility.

Safety Tips:

- Take the following steps to minimize anger behind the wheel:
- When you know that you are very emotional about something, delay driving until you have calmed down.
 - Awareness is the first step toward controlling anger. The second step is handling it in a healthy manner, such as taking a vigorous walk several times around the block or more if necessary, or talking with a friend or a professional counselor. Getting behind the wheel in a highly emotional state, whether joy or anger, diverts attention from the driving task and invites trouble.

8

My thoughts wander when I am driving.

The ideal answer is “Never,” but even the best drivers catch themselves at this “Sometimes.” However, if you checked “Always,” you are a dangerous driver. Driving is a complicated and demanding task, requiring continuous concentration. Even momentary lapses can lead to danger.

Investigations of collisions and fatalities of older drivers, particularly those over age 65, show that inattention and failing to take action are underlying causes, or at least contributing factors.

Not seeing road signs or stop signs, failing to yield, and so on, are major problems of older drivers cited for violations or involved in collisions. These problems are thought to be due to inattention.

Of course, you have probably seen drivers in animated conversations or talking on car phones and noticed how it affected their driving – slamming on brakes or drifting from their lanes. Other drivers drink coffee, groom themselves, or try to glance at reading materials while driving. In an emergency, these inattentive drivers may not be able to return from their diversion in time to take evasive action.

Many conditions that you may not be able to control can interfere with your ability to concentrate: emotional upset, fatigue, illness, medications, alcohol, full meals, pain, or a loud radio.

One area in which you have total control is your decision to give driving your full attention. Give driving the attention it deserves, and you will buy yourself valuable seconds of reaction time in an emergency.

There are several things you can do to keep your thoughts from wandering:

- Treat driving as a complicated task requiring your full attention. Remember 20 complex decisions are needed for every mile you drive.
- If you catch yourself daydreaming or otherwise failing to concentrate on your driving, identify what is diverting you and try to overcome it.
- Take the necessary steps to remove or reduce distractions, whether they are those over which you have control, such as turning off the radio, or those for which you will need help, such as dealing with emotional issues.
- As you drive, play the “What If” game to stay alert and mentally prepare for driving emergencies. Ask what you would do if certain situations occur.

Investigations of collisions and fatalities of older drivers, particularly those over age 65, show that inattention and failing to take action are underlying causes, or at least contributing factors.

Safety Tips:

9

Traffic situations make me angry.

The best answer is “Never,” but those who have been stuck in traffic for long periods understand why “Sometimes” might be chosen. An answer of “Always” reveals that some changes are needed.

Anger behind the wheel comes out in dangerous ways. Most people trapped in slow-moving traffic feel frustrated, and this frustration can lead to anger at the situation. However, some people direct their anger at other people, instead of the traffic situation itself. This can lead to inappropriate reactions, honking horns, yelling at other drivers, cutting others off in traffic, blocking intersections, or playing one-upmanship games with other drivers.

When drivers become over-emotional, all out of proportion to the situation, it is a clear sign that other emotions are the true cause and driving has become an outlet for expressing anger. Many emotions can turn into anger. Fear of other drivers, who they feel are driving recklessly, can bring on violent anger. Anxiety over being late and anger at other situations in one’s life can also provoke unwarranted anger. All these emotions are counter-productive.

The worst part of the anger is how drivers express it. If you find yourself driving erratically, driving too fast, or tailgating someone “to teach them a lesson,” then you need to stop and ask yourself: “Is it worth it?” Anyone with a heart condition knows that reacting to every little annoyance and frustration with anger can be dangerous; we all need to understand that reacting to driving situations with aggressive driving can be just as fatal as a heart attack.

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to make driving less stressful and make your own responses less emotional:

Safety Tips:

- Accept the fact that anger will do nothing to get you out of irritating traffic situations. On the contrary, it may get you into collisions. Taking a few slow, deep breaths and forcing yourself to smile are excellent stress-relievers.
- Choose to be a responsible driver. Recognize when you are becoming angry. Then examine why anger seems to reach irrational proportions. Ask yourself: “Why am I getting upset?” Then, try to take the necessary corrective steps. Keep cool.
- Try to avoid the kind of traffic you know is likely to generate anger. The smoother the traffic flow, the less the anger, and the fewer the collisions.
- If you think that you might be converting fear of traffic into anger, take steps to boost your skills and confidence, such as taking a re-training or refresher course.

Taking a few slow, deep breaths and forcing yourself to smile are excellent stress-relievers.

10

I get regular eye checks to keep my vision at its sharpest.

The only acceptable answer is "Always."

Eighty-five to ninety-five percent of all sensing clues in driving come through the eyes. Poor visual capacity is directly related to poor driving. Reduced performance from faulty vision shows up in slowed response to signals, signs, and traffic events in ways that can lead to a collision.

Doctors cannot correct all vision problems, but only doctors can help you with those vision problems that are correctable, such as visual acuity (ability to focus) and disease-related vision loss. Seeing a doctor on a regular basis is the only way to be sure that your vision is the best it can be.

Aging does bring vision problems, but we all share these difficulties in a fairly predictable, natural way. No matter how well you have taken care of your eyes, these problems will develop.

Between 40 and 60 our night vision becomes progressively worse. Pupils become smaller, the muscles less elastic, and the lenses become thicker and less clear. **A 60-year-old driver must have 10 times the light required by a 20-year-old.**

During this time, we become sensitive to glare, which also makes driving at night difficult. Your eyes' lenses can become thicker and yellowed with age, resulting in a fogging vision and sensitivity to glare. **A 55-year-old takes eight times as long to recover from glare as a 16-year-old.**

Visual changes accelerate at age 55. You begin to miss objects that are not moving, such as pedestrians waiting to enter a crosswalk.

Around age 70, your peripheral vision becomes a serious problem. Poor peripheral vision increases your chances of being involved in a collision. Drivers receive 98% of their visual communication through peripheral vision. Those with poor peripheral vision have collision rates twice as high as those with normal peripheral vision.

Colors become harder to see. Red colors do not appear bright to many older eyes, and it may take some senior drivers twice as long as it took in earlier years to detect the flash of brake lights.

Another visual ability that declines over the years is depth perception: how close or how far you are in relation to a car or object ahead. This capacity is especially critical when trying to judge how fast other cars are coming, which contributes to the problems you may have in making left turns.

Several medical conditions that tend to come with age can affect sight: cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetes. Regular visits to your doctor can help you head off their blinding effects.

There are several things you can do to handle the loss of vision that comes with aging:

Drivers receive 98% of their visual communication through peripheral vision. Those with poor peripheral vision have collision rates twice as high as those with normal peripheral vision.

Safety Tips:

- First and foremost, set up periodic examinations with your eye doctor. Tell the doctor that you are interested not simply in an eye-chart test, but in a thorough examination that will help you to remain a safe driver.
- Take the corrective steps recommended by your doctor. If eyeglasses are prescribed, keep them up to date by letting the doctor know at once if they are not working well for you. If your doctor recommends a cataract operation, keep in mind that this is a simple, out-patient procedure that may dramatically improve your vision.
- Enroll in an older driver training course where you can learn specific techniques for coping with the limits imposed by aging eyes. You may also learn about how to use special devices, such as larger mirrors, that you can install.
- Accept the limits of "aging eyes," and reduce the amount of driving you do after dark and at twilight (one of the most dangerous times). The chances of having a collision are three times greater at night than in daytime.
- Avoid tinted windshields and always keep your windshield and headlights clean.

11

I check with my doctor or pharmacist about the effects of my medications on driving ability.

The only acceptable answer is "Always."

While you might be wary of the effects of prescription drugs, even over-the-counter drugs can reduce driving ability.

Twenty-five percent of all drug prescriptions go to people over 65, who make up 11 percent of the total population. Older people consume more drugs than any other age group.

The drugs that slow us down generally also slow down or reduce our capacity to make decisions and process information rapidly. And quick decisions are needed to maneuver a vehicle safely. Tranquilizers or cold remedies, such as cold tablets, cough syrup, and sleeping pills, can reduce driving ability.

Combinations of drugs present another danger, because these combinations can bring on unexpected side effects and bad reactions. If you have more than one doctor prescribing medications without knowing what the others are prescribing, you could be in danger.

Another drug, which you may not think of as a drug, with this same effect is alcohol. Alcohol has a powerful impact on our total system, physical and psychological. Alcohol is probably the single most important human factor in fatal collisions for drivers over 65.

It is important to avoid alcoholic beverages when taking other medications. With few exceptions, combining alcohol and other drugs significantly multiplies the impairment of your driving skills. Even worse, they make a potent additive that in extreme cases can cause coma or death.

Alcohol is probably the single most important human factor in fatal collisions for drivers over 65.

One's tolerance for alcohol decreases steadily with age.

The only safe practice is to avoid alcohol completely if there is any chance that you will have to drive. One's tolerance for alcohol decreases steadily with age. Older people are also less efficient at ridding the system of alcohol. Food, mood, fatigue, medication, general health, weight, and size of body can all make a difference in predicting overall effect.

Keep in mind the penalties of drinking and driving: heavy fines, jail sentences, and revocation of license.

You can ensure that your medications are not combining to impair your driving skills by taking the following steps:

Safety Tips:

- Check with your physician to determine what the side effects of a prescribed medication might be and what, if anything, you can do to counter them, particularly as they apply to driving.
- If you have more than one physician prescribing medications, make sure all of them know about all the drugs you are taking, both prescribed and over-the-counter. Bring all your medicines with you when you go to the doctor.
- Read all labels and instructions on prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs to determine side effects and their relationship to whether you should drive. Keep in mind that combinations of medicines can magnify their effects beyond the individual warnings. Ask your pharmacist to look for dangerous drug interactions.
- Convince yourself that the only safe action is not to drink alcoholic beverages at all if you intend to drive, and to refuse to ride with anyone who has been drinking.

12

I try to stay abreast of current information on health practices and habits.

The preferred answer is "Always," but "Sometimes" is also understandable. However, if you checked "Never," then you may have given up on your personal health or think that you have no control over it. You have far more control than you might think: What you eat, how much you exercise, and regular visits to the doctor (and following the doctor's advice) can help you keep driving longer and extend your life.

Eighty percent of the two million annual deaths in the United States and more than half of the disabilities caused by chronic disease are closely related to personal health habits and behavior. Individual life styles have a direct relationship to longevity and the quality of life. It all begins with your attitude about how much control you believe you have over the quality of your life. It ends with how much of it you are willing to exercise.

We all want to be able to handle the demands of safe driving. To keep your license, you must remain alert and quick to respond in emergency situations. You also need to keep up to date about health habits that keep your mind and body in shape and able to handle the demands of safe driving.

Of the 2,000,000 deaths in the U.S. annually, 80% are closely related to personal health habits and behavior.

True, this booklet has emphasized the reductions in driving skills that come with age. But even though research points to changes in the central nervous system as the culprits, you can reduce this slowing down with increased motivation to improve and stay in shape. Exercise reduces the extent of slowing, and extended exercise may eliminate it completely.

Learn to appreciate the close ties between personal health habits and driving skills. The same attitude that encourages you to remain informed on health practices will also help you to feel in control of your future as a driver.

You can stay informed by following these steps:

Safety Tips:

- Think realistically about how much control you have and want in terms of health habits as they relate to your life in general and to your driving.
- Learn more about the relationships between good health practices and how they can help you drive safely longer. Keep in mind that the slowness that comes with aging can be deterred or overcome by motivation, regular exercise, and practice.
- Take as much control as you can of your health habits and life style, recognizing the obvious connection between command of personal health and skill in driving.
- Understand the value of nutrition, exercise, medical check-ups, and the effects of medications, drugs, and alcohol. Your doctor can give you information about all of these areas and tell you where to get more information.
- If you feel you cannot change and are simply waiting for the inevitable aging and loss of skills, consider giving up your license. As difficult as that may be, it is better to stop driving than to be involved in a crash that can injure or kill you and others.

13

My children, other family members, or friends are concerned about my driving ability.

“Never” is the best answer here, but many older drivers have been aware of critical comments on their driving. If you have heard such comments, you may feel that the critics are worse drivers than you or are generally afraid in certain traffic situations, no matter who is driving.

It is difficult to accept criticism, but it can be a valuable source of information about your driving skills. If you chose “Always” or “Sometimes,” then you can use this information as an opportunity to learn where your driving needs the most improvement.

Of all age groups, drivers over 50 have the most misconceptions of the actual risk of having a collision. These misconceptions grow with age. Furthermore, older drivers underestimate how much their own actions and problems contribute to accident risk.

Listen to criticism, so you can improve your driving skills and avoid collisions. Once you start having collisions, the law can take your license away.

Of all age groups, drivers over 50 have the most misconceptions of the actual risk of having a collision.

Safety Tips:

Here are some suggestions for how to listen to criticism and comments and turn them into a positive effect on your driving:

- Lend an open ear to the comments of those concerned about your driving, and keep an open mind. Be sure that you are not dismissing the value of these comments out of denial.
- Look for clues to overcome the dangers of those comments that you judge as valid. It is possible that a driving refresher course or corrective action, such as treatment for faulty vision, might help.
- Look at your responses to the other questions in this self-evaluation. Be very honest with yourself, so you can locate specific problem areas and correct them. Human beings are never too old to learn new skills.
- Begin to prepare for the day when driving will no longer be possible for you, so you can remain mobile after you stop driving. With adequate planning, a non-driving life does not have to be restrictive.

14

How many traffic tickets, warnings, or “discussions” with officers have you had in the past two years?

Of course, “None” is the preferred answer here, for it would be a sign that you are doing everything you should be doing to remain a safe driver (or at least have been alert enough not to have been caught doing the things you should not be doing). “One or two” incidents might mean that you are not as current as you should be on laws and rules of the road. “Three or more” demands a serious look at how you are driving. If you have been stopped many times, then you must be driving dangerously a good part of the time. If little can realistically be done to reduce that danger, you should make alternate plans for transportation.

Some older drivers are aware of their limits and cope with them. Others, however, overestimate their real capabilities and do not adjust their driving habits. The most cited problems of older drivers include failure to yield, failure to observe signs and signals, careless crossing of intersections, changing lanes without due regard for others, improper backing, and driving too slowly. Inattention and having too much information to handle at one time seem to be the root of most of these conditions.

There are several positive steps you can take if you have received traffic tickets or warnings:

Safety Tips:

- Examine why you got the ticket or warning to determine the true cause. Did you miss a stop sign because you were inattentive or because you simply did not see it? Then act on that information. This booklet contains several specific recommendations for particular problems. Review this book and use the Suggestions for Improvement to improve your driving skills.
- Use the citation or ticket as a warning sign. Act quickly, since citations relate directly to collisions.

- Enroll in an older driver training course where you can brush up on your driving skills and learn new ways to handle the challenges faced by older drivers.

15

How many accidents have you had during the past two years?

Once again, “None” is the most desirable answer. Depending on the severity, “One or two” can be one or two too many. If you answered “Three or more,” we are thankful that you are here and able to participate in this self-evaluation experience.

A collision is the best predictor of another collision. One collision is often a signal that others are on the way.

Older drivers are likely to be held at fault for many of the same reasons for which they receive traffic citations: failing to yield, not observing traffic signs and signals, careless crossing at intersections, improper turning and lane changing, and careless backing up.

Older drivers with the most recorded collisions do most of their driving under conditions conducive to collisions – at night and in bad weather. They also have a higher incidence of medical conditions, such as heart and artery problems, arthritis, broken bones, visual and hearing problems, and diabetes.

Denial of diminishing skills is the older driver’s greatest danger. Denial results in a continuation of the most dangerous driving habits and keeps the driver from learning new and better ways to drive. Without correction, dangerous driving habits can lead to tragedy.

If you have been involved in a collision, act at once by taking one or more of the following steps:

Safety Tips:

- Remember that your insurance may be cancelled if you are involved in too many collisions, even minor ones.
- Take a refresher course. Even if the collision was not your fault, you will learn valuable defensive driving techniques that will help you anticipate trouble before it happens.
- Ask someone whose judgment you trust to ride with you and tell you when you forget to signal or do something else that is unsafe. It is hard to pay attention to traffic and assess our own skills at the same time. An objective assessment is always enlightening.
- If your collision(s) occurred at night or in bad weather, and you suspect that these factors contributed to the collision, avoid driving at these times.
- Begin to prepare for the day when driving will no longer be possible for you, so you can remain mobile after you stop driving. Be honest with yourself; if you are a danger on the road, take responsibility and either improve your skills or stop driving.

A collision is the best predictor of another collision. One collision is often a signal that others are on the way.

Driving Improvement Courses

The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) offer driver improvement courses, including a course designed for older drivers, the "Mature Operator Course."

Contact your local AAA or CAA club to find out about driving improvement courses available in your area. They will also be able to send you the brochures mentioned in this booklet. To find out the telephone number of your local AAA club use your phone directory or call 1-800-AAA-HELP.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) offers the "55 Alive Course." Write to AARP 55 ALIVE, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

The National Safety Council offers a Defensive Driving Course nationally. Some areas offer a course specifically for older drivers. Contact the local chapter of the National Safety Council or call 1-800-621-6244 to find out about courses in your area.

Many hospitals and senior centers sponsor programs to improve the driving skills of drivers age 55 and up.

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