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Is it Time to Change Your Driving Habits?

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KEUKA PARK, N.Y.—Driving is an important part of many people's lives, especially the elderly. It is a connection to the outside world for health, family, socialization, church, and friends.

As we get older, natural body changes affect our ability to drive safely. Our hearing and vision become less keen and our ability to respond quickly to situations slows down.

However, the good news is that with age comes wisdom, and many people adapt to these natural body changes with their brains. They change their driving habits.

But how do you know when to make changes? First, it's important to assess your situation. A few warning signs that may indicate problems:

- You feel less comfortable and more nervous or fearful when driving.
- Your friends or relatives refuse to ride with you.
- You get lost more frequently.
- You have difficulty judging gaps in traffic at intersections or on highway entrance/exit ramps.

If one or more of these warning signs are present, the next step is to initiate conversations with your spouse and children about driving. Then, consider:

- enrolling in a classroom refresher course such as the AARP Driver Safety Program;
- talking to your physician about getting an occupational therapy evaluation that may lead to adaptive equipment or strategies for safe driving;
- use public transportation—such as a senior shuttle—especially during the winter; and
- limiting driving to certain times of the day or familiar areas.



Even if you limit your driving to daylight hours because you don't see well at night, there are some things to keep in mind before and after you get behind the wheel, including these from the American Academy of Family Physicians:

- Plan your trips ahead of time. For example, decide what time to leave and which roads to take.
- Drive at the speed limit; it's unsafe to drive too fast or too slow.
- Be extra careful at intersections and use turn signals. If you have trouble making left turns at intersections, make three right turns instead.
- When you take new medicines, ask the doctor or pharmacist about side effects that could hamper your ability to drive.
- Check your blind spot when changing lanes or backing up.
- Schedule your shopping trips on weekdays when parking may be easier.

Stay safe for you and your family.