

When Should Older Drivers Stop Driving?

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One of the most emotionally charged challenges facing older adults and their families is deciding when is it time to "retire" as a driver.

Everyone can recognize the many losses that individuals may experience growing older—loss of a spouse, loss of health, loss of one's home, loss of financial resources, loss of one's friends and pets.

However in addition to these losses, the idea of turning in one's car keys can elicit anxiety, resistance and anger--all related to the fear of losing one's independence. "After safely driving for 50 to 60 years, how could I possibly survive without driving?" is often understandably asked.

However, one's age alone isn't necessarily related to loss of driving skills. Al Bloom, the Zone Coordinator for AARP, states "it's all the physical issues like vision and reaction times, the horrible driving conditions today, accident rates, insurance costs, etc." that need to be considered.

Who makes the decision to stop driving and when, impacts the outcome of this major transition greatly. If an adult child comes in, and reactively states, "That's it, no more driving, I'm taking your car," problems certainly will occur.

On the other hand, if family, friends, doctors and others help an aging person successfully plan for a transition to life without a car, as health, mobility, memory and reaction time deteriorate, that trauma can be minimized for everyone.

Proactive planning involves making a list of all the places one

typically goes to—shopping, doctors, dentists, movies, library, favorite restaurant, etc. and the frequency. Look at alternatives: find a physician who makes home visits, a closer restaurant, movies delivered to your mailbox, etc. can then all be explored.

Independent seniors usually aren't aware of all the community resources that can fill the transportation gap—nor do they like the idea of "public transportation," initially. Present the positives: it is safer and less expensive, with no need for car insurance, maintenance or gas costs.

Start the family dialogue early, we all want to prevent a bad accident, and emphasize the positive advantages of NOT having to drive.

Creatively look at all resources and remember to emotionally support and acknowledge the difficult reality of "retiring from driving".

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