

Tips for smart seniors behind the wheel.

Don't drink & drive. Be careful about interaction of alcohol and medications. Don't drive if medication taken causes dizziness or drowsiness.

Buy the right car. Medium rather than large car – can you safely handle an SUV? Dashboard instruments and gauges should be easily readable. Color should be darker to avoid glare, Electric seats & windows? Tinted windows may cause a problem for seniors because as we grow older we naturally need more light to see what we saw when we were younger. A new car should have ABS brakes, head restraints, seat belts, air bags. Leather seats better for hip problems.

Reduce speed on poor roads, in bad weather, and in crowded areas - excessive speed is the most common error leading to a crash because of the reduced reaction time of seniors, the increased stopping distance and harder crash impact.

Reduce distractions which may lead to a crash such as tuning the radio/CD, using a cell phone, talking too much with others, eating, personal grooming or trying to get out-of-reach objects. When driving - drive – don't multi task.

Become educated and updated on driving – take a defensive driving class for mature drivers from the National Safety Council, AAA or AARP.

Recognize the changes during the aging process – vision changes which require more light to see makes driving at night more hazardous, hearing loss, reduced flexibility of neck and back muscles, shrinking, less strength and reduced reaction time.

Make right turns not left turns whenever possible.

Apply a 4-second following rule due to slower reaction time.

Find slower routes – not the expressway if possible – avoid the rush hour.

Avoid construction, gravel roads, poor roads.

Clean the inside and outside of the windows to improve visibility.

Drive during day when possible avoid night travel.

Exercise – walking and stretching – keep neck, hands and arms flexible stretch before driving.

Use the mirrors in a new way – looking over shoulder best but if cannot use mirrors. Adjust mirrors to be able to see cars in the blind spots. Also if neck is less flexible turn shoulders, twist from the waist to look to blind spot.

Rest often when making long trips.

Hold the steering wheel with your hands at 9AM and 3PM.

Is it safe to drive when taking your medication? Does it cause dizziness?

Know the signs that tell if you should not be driving.

- Are you having near collisions, turning in front of others causing them to brake quickly?
- Are you becoming disoriented?
- Do familiar neighborhoods seem strange?
- Are you driving too slowly?
- Do others criticize your driving?
- Do you have poor eyesight or hearing?

If concerned see your doctor. You may also take a test on a computer which evaluates whether you should keep on driving or not. Senior centers have access to this program.